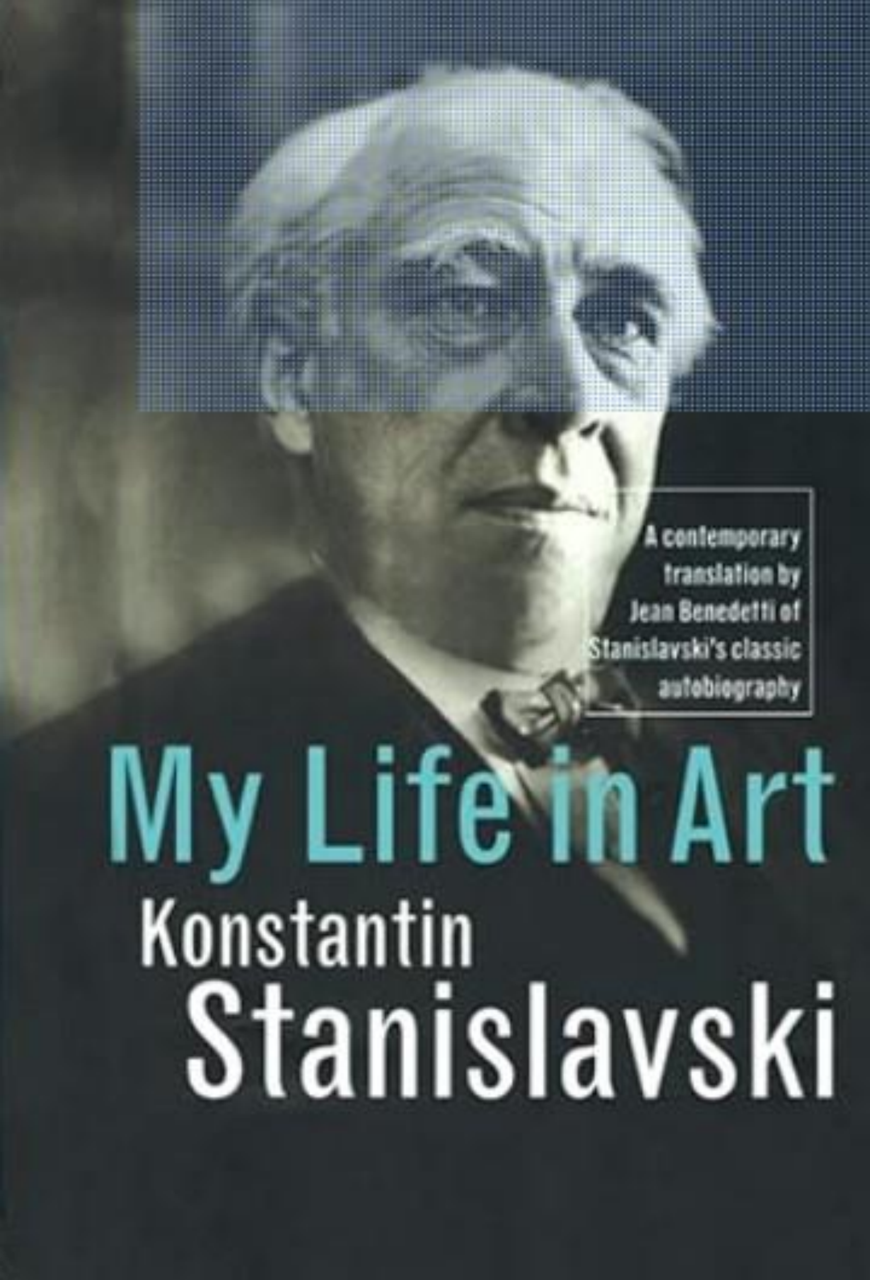


A contemporary
translation by
Jean Benedetti of
Stanislavski's classic
autobiography

My Life in Art

Konstantin
Stanislavski

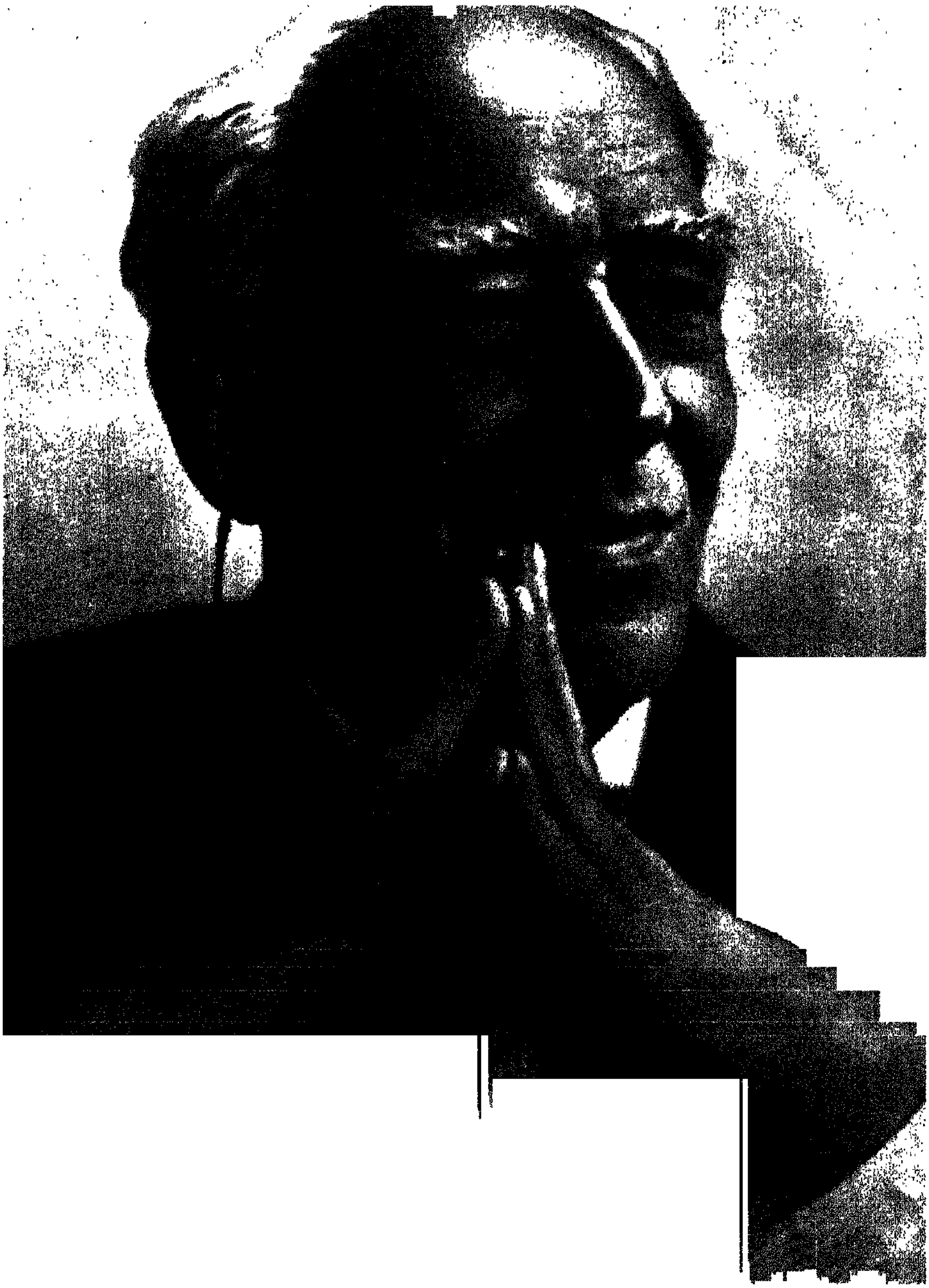
"I never forget, I cannot forget, how much and how splendidly you have worked, how many talented people you have taught, how many splendid actors you have given to our country. This is an historical contribution of which you can be as undeniably and indisputably proud as you can of your own artistic career."

MAXIM GORKY
(from a letter to Stanislavsky, 1928, from Sorrento)

"Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavsky—this is a name that means a great deal not only to us who knew, loved and worked with him, but to the younger generation and to our descendants in years to come, urging us all to be strict and pure in our attitude to, and understanding of, art."

OLGA KNIPPER-CHEKHOVA
(Theatre, No. 1, 1953, p. 145)

SOVIET ARTS



KONSTANTIN **STANISLAVSKY**

My Life in Art

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY G. IVANOV-MUMJIEV

DESIGNED BY Y. KRASNY

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST RUSSIAN EDITION

I WANTED TO WRITE a book about the creative work done by the Moscow Art Theatre in the 25 years of its existence and about my own work there. However, I spent the past two years abroad, touring Europe and America with the greater part of our company, and it was there that I wrote this book at the request of an American firm which published it in Boston in English under the title *My Life in Art*.[1] This compelled me to make considerable changes in my original plans and prevented me from saying much that I had intended to share with my reader. Unfortunately, the present state of our book market has deprived me of the possibility of substantially supplementing the book, of increasing its volume, and I therefore have had to drop much that came back to me as I looked back on my life in art. I do not speak, for instance, of many people who worked with us in the Art Theatre—some of them still very successful and popular and others no longer alive. I do not speak of the hard work put in by Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko as a stage director and in his other capacities, nor of the creative endeavour of my other colleagues, the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, who have influenced my life too. I do not mention the administrative personnel and the stage hands, with whom we have lived in concord for many years and who love the theatre and, together with us, have made many sacrifices for it. I do not even name many of the friends of our theatre—all those whose attitude to our art has facilitated our work and created, so to speak, the atmosphere necessary for our activity.

Briefly, in its present form the book is in no way a story of the Art Theatre. It speaks only of my quests in art and serves as a sort of preface for my other book in which I shall describe the results of my quests—my methods of actor's creation and how to approach it.

K. STANISLAVSKY

April 1925

CHILDHOOD

OBSTINACY

I WAS BORN in Moscow in 1863, a time that may well be taken as the border-line between two epochs. I can still recall remnants of the age of serfdom, lard candles and icon lamps, the pony express, stage-coaches and that peculiar Russian conveyance called the *tarantas*, the flint-lock muskets, the cannon that were small enough to be mistaken for playthings. I have witnessed the coming of railways, and express trains, electric searchlights, automobiles, aeroplanes, steamboats, cruisers, submarines, the telephone and telegraph, the radio, and the 12-inch gun. In such wise, from the lard candle to the electric searchlight, from the *tarantas* to the aeroplane, from the sailboat to the submarine, from the pony express to the radio, from the flint-lock to the Big Bertha, from serfdom to Bolshevism and Communism, I have lived an interesting life in an age of changing values and fundamental ideas.

My father Sergei Vladimirovich Alexeyev,[2] a manufacturer and merchant, was a pure-blooded Russian and Muscovite. My mother, Yelizaveta Vasilyevna Alexeyeva, had a Russian father and a French mother,–the famous actress Varley who played in Petersburg as a guest performer. This actress married the rich owner of a quarry in Finland, Vasily Abramovich Yakovlev, who erected the Column of Alexander in Palace Square in Petersburg.

She soon divorced Yakovlev, leaving him two children, my mother and an aunt. Yakovlev married Mrs. B who had a Turkish mother and a Greek father, and it was she who brought up his daughters. Her house was run in a very aristocratic fashion. The court manners she had acquired from her mother, who was stolen from the Turkish Sultan's harem, manifested themselves. This Turkish woman had been shipped by Mr. B, her Greek husband, from Constantinople in a crate, and it was only when the ship was safely out of port that the haremite was released from the crate.

My mother's stepmother and her sister, who married my father's brother, loved high society life and were famous for their dinners and balls.

Moscow and Petersburg danced through the 'sixties and 'seventies–during the social season balls were given daily and young people attended two or three of them in the course of one evening. I remember those balls. The guests would arrive in four-in-hands and six-in-hands, with their lackeys sitting stiff in their liveries on the coach-boxes or standing behind on the footboards. Bonfires would be lighted in the street opposite the house, and the drivers were served food as they gathered around. The lower stories of the house were given over for the entertainment of the lackeys. Flowers and glittering finery would be seen everywhere. The ladies came with necks and bosoms covered with jewels, and those who liked to count the riches of others would be busy appraising the value of the gems. The poorer considered themselves unhappy and were ashamed of their poverty. The richer behaved as if they were the queens of the ball. Cotillions with the most peculiar figures, with rich gifts and prizes for the dancers, would last for five hours without stopping. The balls usually ended in broad daylight, and the young men, hurriedly changing their clothes, would go to work.

Unlike the others of their circle, my parents did not enjoy this sort of life and visited gala affairs only when they could not avoid them. They were very home-loving people. My mother spent all her time in the nursery, devoting herself completely to her children—and there were ten of us.

My father, until his marriage, slept in the same bed with his father, who was famous for his old-fashioned patriarchal mode of life which he inherited from his great-grandfather—a peasant and vegetable farmer in Yaroslavl Gubernia. After his marriage, my father passed to his conjugal couch, where he slept to the end of his days, and where he died.

My parents never stopped loving each other. They loved us children and tried to keep us as near to themselves as they could. Of my infancy I remember most clearly my own christening, which I recreated vividly in my mind from the stories told me by my nurse. Another remote recollection is my stage début, which took place in our country-house in Tarasovka, some twenty miles from Moscow along the Yaroslavl Railway. The performance was given in one of the wings of our house, where a small children's stage was erected with a plaid cloth for a curtain. As custom has it, the entertainment was composed of tableaux, in this case the four seasons of the year. I was about three or four years old at that time, and impersonated Winter. In the centre of the stage was a small fir-tree, with cotton all around it. I sat on the floor, wrapped in a fur coat, with a fur hat on my head, and a long beard and moustaches that insisted on crawling up my forehead, without knowing where to look and what to do. I probably felt, if subconsciously, the aimlessness and absurdity of my presence on the stage, and even now this feeling is alive in me and frightens me more than anything else when I am on the stage. After the applause, which I remember pleased me very much, I was placed on the stage again, but in a different pose. This time a candle was lit and placed in a small bundle of branches to give the effect of a bonfire, and I was given a small piece of wood which I was to make-believe I was throwing into the fire.

"Remember, it is only make-believe; it is not in earnest," I was told.

And I was strictly forbidden to bring the piece of wood close to the candlelight. All this seemed nonsensical to me. Why should I only make-believe when I could really put the wood into the fire?

In a word, as soon as the curtain rose, I stretched my hand towards the fire with great interest and curiosity. It was easy and pleasant to do this, for there was meaning in that motion; it was a completely natural and logical action. Even more natural and logical was the fact that the cotton caught fire. There was a great deal of excitement and noise. I was bundled off the stage and taken to the nursery where I wept bitterly.

These impressions, of the pleasure of success and the inner truth of sensible behaviour and action on the stage, on the one hand, and of the bitterness of failure and of the discomfort of senseless presence before an audience, on the other, have gone with me through my life.

Thus, my stage début was a failure due to my obstinacy, a trait which, especially in my early boyhood, manifested itself very strongly. This innate obstinacy had a certain influence on my stage career, both good and bad. It is for this reason that I dwell on it. My struggle with obstinacy was a long one; it left many vivid recollections.

One day, when we were having breakfast, I behaved very mischievously and Father reprimanded me. Thoughtlessly, without any anger, I replied insolently. He ridiculed me, and, unable to find what to say, I grew confused and angry at myself. In order to hide my confusion and show that I was not afraid of Father, I uttered an altogether senseless threat. I still don't know how it left my lips.

"I won't let you go to Aunt Vera!"[3]

"That's foolish," said Father. "What do you mean you won't let me go?"

Realizing that I had said something idiotic, and growing even more angry at myself, I became altogether obstinate, and repeated:

"I won't let you go to Aunt Vera!"

Father shrugged his shoulders without saying anything. This hurt; he did not want to speak to me. Well, the worse I was, the better it would be.

"I *won't let* you go to Aunt Vera! I won't let you go to *Aunt Vera*! I won't *let* you go to Aunt Vera!" I repeated this sentence insistently and impudently, changing the intonation of the words each time.

Father told me to keep quiet, and just because of that I said, very distinctly:

"I WON'T LET YOU GO TO AUNT VERA!"

Father continued to read his paper in silence. But I could see he was irritated.

"I won't let *you* go to Aunt Vera! I won't let you go to Aunt *Vera*! I won't *let you go* to Aunt Vera!" I hammered at him in dull and obstinate anger, powerless to combat the evil force which was carrying me away. Feeling how weak I was in its grasp, I began to be afraid of it.

"I won't let you go to *Aunt Vera!*" I said again, after a pause and against my own will, feeling that I could no longer control myself.

Father warned me, and I automatically repeated the same foolish sentence louder and more insistently. He rapped on the table with his finger, and I aped him, accompanying it with the same sentence. He rose; and so did I, with the same refrain. Father raised his voice in anger (this had never happened to him before); I raised mine also, but it trembled. He controlled himself and spoke softly. I remember that this moved me deeply and that I longed to surrender. But against my own will I again repeated the impudent sentence, and it looked that I was making a laughing-stock of him. Father warned me that he would put me in a corner. I repeated my foolish sentence, imitating his tone.

"I will leave you without dinner," Father said more severely.

"I won't let you go to Aunt Vera!" I said in despair, imitating his tone again.

"Do you understand what you are doing?" Father asked, throwing his paper on the table.

Unable to control the anger that was surging within me, I threw down my serviette and shouted as loud as I could:

"I won't let you go to Aunt Vera!"

"That will put an end to it," I thought.

Father flamed up and his lips began to tremble, but he controlled himself, and quickly left the room, uttering a terrible sentence:

"You are not my son."

Left alone, the victor of the encounter, I realized how foolish I had been.

"Papa, I'm sorry, I won't do it again!" I shouted after him tearfully. But Father was already in another room and did not hear my cries of remorse.

I remember all the spiritual stages of my childish fit as if the thing took place yesterday, and when I remember them I experience all over again an anguished pain in my heart.

During another fit of obstinacy, I was badly put to rout. I had been boasting at dinner that I could lead Voronoi, my father's most ill-tempered horse, out of his stall.

"Wonderful!" jested my father. "After dinner we shall make you put on your fur coat and felt boots, and you will show us how brave you are."

"I'll put them on, and I'll lead him out." I was obstinate.

My sisters and brothers said I was a coward and dared me do it. To prove what they were saying they reminded me of certain compromising facts. The more unpleasant their revelations became, the more obstinately I repeated in my confusion:

"I'm not afraid. I'll lead him out."

My obstinacy went so far that it became necessary to give me a lesson. After dinner they brought my coat, boots, gloves, and winter hood. Then they dressed me, led me out into the courtyard, left me alone, and went in to await my appearance with Voronoi. It was dark and quiet outside. The darkness seemed all the darker because of the light in the large windows of the parlour —it seemed that I was being watched. My heart sank within me, and my teeth closed on the hem of my sleeve as I tried to force myself to forget the darkness and the silence about me. Some few steps away I heard the sound of footsteps in the snow, the creaking of a threshold, and the closing of a door. Perhaps it was the coachman who entered the stall of Voronoi, whom I had promised to lead out. I imagined the great black horse beating the ground with an impatient hoof, rearing up, ready to rush forward and drag me after him as if I were a feather. Of course, if I had seen this picture at dinner, I would not have boasted. But as I had blurted out the thing, I did not want to stop half-way. I was ashamed and so I became obstinate.

So I philosophized to distract my attention from the surrounding darkness.

"I'll stay here for a long, long time, until they become frightened and come out to look for me," I decided.

Suddenly I heard a piteous cry, and I began to listen to the sounds around me. There were a great many of them! And one was more terrible than the other! Who was that stealing after me in the darkness? Nearer, nearer! A dog? A rat? I took a few steps towards the nearest niche in the wall. At the same time there was some noise in the darkness. What was it? Again, again, very near now! Perhaps Voronoi was kicking at the door of his stall or a carriage wheel bounced over a bump in the street. But what was that hissing? And that whistling? It seemed that all the terrible sounds I had ever known suddenly came to life and broke in chaos about me.

"Oh!" I cried and jumped into the very farthest corner of the niche. Something grabbed me by the leg. But it was only the watchdog Roska, my best friend. Now there were two of us! It was not as terrible as before. I took Roska in my arms and she began to lick my face with her dirty tongue. My heavy, clumsy fur coat, tightly bound with the ends of my hood, prevented me from saving my face from the dog's caresses. I pushed away her snout, and she went to sleep in my arms, quiet in their embracing warmth. Somebody was rapidly coming towards me from the direction of the gates. Was it for me? My heart leaped. But no, that somebody passed into the coachman's outhouse.

I thought my family would all be ashamed by now. They had thrown me out, me, a little child, in such a frost–almost like in a fairy-tale. I would never forgive them.

From the house came the hollow sounds of a grand piano.

"That must be my brother playing. As if nothing had happened. He is playing! And they've forgotten all about me. How long must I wait here till they remember?" I became more frightened, and I wanted to get back to the parlour, to its warmth, to the piano more than anything else in the world.

"I'm a fool! A fool! Why did I think of this? Why Voronoi of all things? I'm a blockhead!" I scolded myself, realizing the foolishness of my situation, from which, I thought, there was no escape.

The gates creaked, there was a clatter of hoofs, wheels crunched in the snow. A carriage stopped near the front door. The door slammed, and the carriage began to turn around in the courtyard.

"Must be my cousins," I thought. "They were invited to come this evening. Now I won't go back at all. They will call me a coward."

The coachman knocked at the window of the outhouse, our coachman came out, I heard them talk, the stable was opened, the horses were led inside.

"I'll go in with them, I'll ask them to give me Voronoi, and of course they won't. So I won't have to lie; it will be a very clever way out."

I cheered up; it was a brilliant thought. I dropped Roska from my arms and made ready to go into the stable.

"If only I was brave enough to go through the large, dark courtyard!" I took a step and stopped, for another carriage had entered the yard, and I was afraid to get under the hoofs of the horse in the darkness. At that moment some catastrophe occurred–I did not know what it was because I could not tell in the darkness. The horses that were tied in the stable began to neigh, then to stamp, then to kick at the door of the stable. It seemed to me that the horse of the newly arrived coachman was also restless. Somebody was running after the carriage about the courtyard. The coachmen leaped out of the outhouse, crying, "Stop! Hold her! Don't let her get away!"

I don't exactly remember what happened after. I was at the front door, ringing the bell. The doorman let me in. Of course, he must have been waiting for me. Father's figure flashed by in the lobby; the governess looked down from the staircase. I sat down on a chair in the lobby without removing my coat. My entrance was so unexpected to myself that I could not decide what to do–to continue in my obstinacy and to affirm that I had only come in to warm myself in order to go out for Voronoi again, or to confess my cowardice and surrender. I was so disappointed with myself for my lack of spirit that I no longer believed I could play the hero. Besides, there was nobody to enjoy my performance. All of them seemed to have forgotten about me.

"So much the better. I'll also forget. I'll remove my coat, wait a little while, and then go into the parlour."

And that is what I did. Nobody asked me anything about Voronoi. They must have agreed not to.

THE CIRCUS

OF THE MEMORIES of emotions and experiences in my late childhood those that have remained with me the longest have to do with artistic spectacles. Let me but recall some of the circumstances of that period, and I seem to grow younger again and feel the old, familiar emotions surging through me.

For instance, take the eve and the morning of a holiday. We children are allowed to sleep late; before us is a day of freedom and many joys. These joys are necessary to uphold our energy during the long, dull school-days and weary evenings ahead. Nature demands joy on a holiday, and he who stands in its way causes anger and evil thoughts to rise in the soul, while he who helps it along earns tender gratefulness.

At breakfast our parents announce that we must visit our aunt (who is dull, as all aunts are), or what is even worse, that our cousins, whom we heartily dislike, are to visit us. We turn to stone, we feel lost. We, who have so impatiently awaited the holiday, see it torn from our grasp and turned into a dull week-day. How shall we ever be able to live till the next holiday?

But if the day is lost there is nevertheless still some hope for the evening. Who knows, perhaps Father, who understands our needs better than anyone else, has got seats for the circus, or the ballet, or the opera at worst, or at the very worst, for a play. Buying theatre tickets is the job of the steward. We ask where he is. Has he gone out? Where? To the right or to the left? Have the coachmen been told not to use our strongest horses till evening? If so, it is a good sign. It means that the large four-seat carriage, in which we children are always taken to the theatre, is needed. But if the big horses have been used in the day-time, all hope is lost. There will be no circus, no theatre.

But the steward has returned. He has been in Father's study and given him something which he took out of a pocket-book. What did he give him? We watch until Father leaves the study. Then we hurry to his writing-table. We see only dull business papers–nothing else. We are overcome with anguish. But if we see a red or yellow pasteboard, our hearts beat so that we can hear them, and the world becomes a beautiful place to live in. Then the aunt and the cousins no longer seem such bores. We exchange compliments with them all, so that in the evening, during dinner, Father might be able to say:

"Today the boys have been kind to their aunt and it is very probable I may do them a little favour, or perhaps a big one. What do you think it is?"

Excited, with lumps of food sticking in our throats, we wait for further developments.

Father silently puts his hand in a side pocket, slowly searches for something there, but finds nothing. Unable to wait any longer, we jump up, rush to him, surround him, while our governess cries severely:

*"Enfants, écoutez donc ce qu'on vous dit. On ne quitte pas sa place pendant le diner."**

Meanwhile Father puts his hand in another pocket, takes out his pocketbook, opens it, and finds nothing in it either. He slowly turns out his pockets, one after the other. There is nothing in them.

"I've lost it," he exclaims, playing his part quite naturally.

The blood leaves our cheeks and is lost in our toes. We are led back to our places, and we sit down. We stare questioningly at each other: is Father jesting or not? But he has already taken something out of the pocket of his waistcoat, and says, smiling slyly:

"Here it is. I've found it," and waves a red ticket above his head.

No one can restrain us now. We leap up from the table, we dance, we stamp our feet, we wave our serviettes, we embrace Father, we hang on his neck, we kiss him. How tenderly we love him now!

But the same instant sees new cares arising within us. We may be late! We swallow our food, we can't wait for the dinner to end, and when it does, we rush to the nursery to tear off our house clothes and carefully put on our Sunday best. And then we sit, wait, and torture ourselves, hoping Father might not be late. He likes to take a nap after his coffee in the empty dining-room. How are we to wake him? We walk past, stamping our feet, dropping heavy objects on the floor, or shouting and pretending we do not know that he is inside. But Father is a heavy sleeper.

"We're late! We're late!" we cry in agitation, running each minute to look at the big clock. "We'll be late for the overture!"

To miss the circus overture! Isn't that a sacrifice?

"It is already seven o'clock!" we exclaim. "When Father wakes up, dresses himself, and begins shaving it will be at least seven twenty. It takes more than fifteen minutes to get there. That will make it seven thirty-five." We realize that we shall miss not only the overture, but the first number on the programme too. Young Ciniselli will give his *voltige arrêtée* without us. How we envy him... ! We must save the evening somehow. So we go to sigh near the door of Mother's room. At this moment we think she is much kinder than Father. We sigh, we exclaim. She understands our tactics and goes to wake Father.

---

* Listen, children, you should not leave the dinner-table. (Fr.)

"If you want to spoil the boys, pamper them, but don't disappoint them," she tells Father, waking him up from his nap. *"Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin!** It is time to suffer."

Father rises, stretches himself, kisses Mother, and goes sleepily to do his duty. We fly like bullets downstairs to order the carriage and to beg Alexei the coachman to drive as fast as he can. We sit in the large carriage, swinging our feet; that gives us a slight illusion of speed. But Father does not appear. Resentment grows in our hearts; not a trace of former gratitude is left. At last he comes out and sits down. The carriage, its wheels creaking in the snow, slowly moves, rolling on its springs. Impatiently we try to help it along by surging forward in our seats. Suddenly and unexpectedly the carriage stops. We have arrived! Not only the second number, but even the third number of the programme is over. But it is our luck that our favourites, the musical clowns Moreno, Mariani, and Inserti, have not yet appeared. Neither has *she.* Our box is near the artistes' entrance. That is good! From here we can see what is going on in the wings, in the private life of these incomprehensible, marvellous people who live side by side with death and risk their lives as if they enjoyed it. Do they get nervous when they go on? This might be the last minute of their life on earth. But they are quietly talking about trifles, about money, about supper. They are real heroes!

The orchestra plays a familiar polka. It is *her* number. Elvira will perform the *Danse de châle,*** on horseback. There she is now. My friends know my secret. It is my number, she is my sweetheart, and all the privileges are mine—the best opera-glasses, the best place, the congratulations of my friends. And truly, she is very pretty tonight. At the end of the number, Elvira comes out to acknowledge the applause and passes within two steps of me. Her nearness turns my head. I want to do something out of the ordinary, so I jump from the box, kiss the hem of her skirt, and return rapidly to my seat. I sit like a man sentenced to death, afraid to move, and ready to cry. My friends approve my action, and Father laughs.

"Let me congratulate you," he jests. "I see you are engaged. When does the wedding take place?"

---

* You asked for it, Georges Dandin. (Fr.)

** The Dance of the Shawl. (Fr.)

Yelizaveta Alexeyeva, Stanislavsky's mother (photographed in the 1890's)

The last and the most boring number—a quadrille on horseback—will be performed by the entire troupe. After it will come next week, in a long procession of joyless, gloomy days, without the least hope of returning here next Sunday Mother won't let Father take us out often. And the circus—the circus is the best place in the whole world!

In order to prolong the pleasure and to live as long as possible with pleasant reminiscences, I make a secret appointment with one of my friends.

"You must come You must not fail me."

"What's up?"

Sergei Alexeyev, Stanislavsky's father (photographed in the 1870's)

"You'll see when you come. It's very important."

My friend comes the next day; we retire to a dark room, and I tell him my great secret. I have decided to become a circus director as soon as I grow old enough. In order that I may not change my mind it is necessary to take an oath. We take an icon from the wall, and I solemnly swear that I will be nothing but a circus director. Then we discuss the programme of the future performances at my circus. We draw up a list of the future troupe, filling it with the names of the best riders, clowns and jockeys we know.

In anticipation of the opening of my circus, we decide to practise by giving a home performance. We form a temporary troupe with my brothers, sisters and friends, distribute the rôles and decide on the numbers of the programme.

"A trained stallion.... I'm the director and trainer, you're the stallion. Then I'll play a red-headed clown while you spread the carpet. Then there will be the musical clowns."

Being the director, I take the best parts, and the rest concede that right to me, because I am a sworn professional and determined to become a circus director. The performance is set for the following Sunday, since there is no hope that we will be taken to the real circus or even to the ballet.

We spend all our free time preparing for the occasion. First we have to print tickets and money. Then we have to build a box-office–that is, stretch a blanket across the door, leaving a small opening in it, near which we are to keep guard all through the day of the performance. This is very important, for a real box-office–perhaps more than anything else–creates the illusion of a real circus. It is necessary to devote some time and thought to the costumes and to the hoops covered with thin paper through which we will jump in the *pas de châle,* and to the ropes and sticks that are to serve as barriers for the trained horses. And then there is the music. That is the most difficult part of the performance. The trouble is that my eldest brother, who alone is capable of taking the place of the orchestra, is very lazy, careless, and undisciplined. He does not look at the affair at hand seriously, and God knows what he may do on the day of the performance. He may play, and suddenly in front of the audience may lie down in the middle of the parlour, lift his legs in the air, and begin to roar, "I don't want to play any more!"

He has done that already. We had to give him a bar of chocolate to make him play. But the performance was spoiled by his foolish act; all its realism was lost. And that was the most important thing for us. It was necessary to believe that all this was serious, that it was real. Otherwise it was not interesting.

There are few spectators and they are always the same: the family and the house servants. But the worst theatre and the worst actors in the world have their admirers. They are certain that only they understand the hidden talents of their protégés, and that all other people are not clever enough to understand it.

We also had our admirers, who followed our performances, and came to them not so much for our satisfaction as for their own. One of most devoted of these was Father's old book-keeper, and for this he was given one of the best places, which flattered him greatly.

In order to help along the work of the box-office, many of our spectators bought tickets throughout the day, pretended that they lost them, and came to the box-office to declare their losses. In each case there was an explanation and the director, that is, I, was asked for final instructions. I would leave my work, come to the box-office, and grant or refuse admittance. So far as the free passes were concerned, there existed a special little book of numbered tickets with the words "Constanzo Alexeyev's Circus" written on every ticket.

On the great day we put on make-up and costumes long before the show began. Coats and waistcoats were pinned, forming evening dress. The clown's costume was made from a long night-shirt tied between the ankles, thus forming something in the shape of baggy pantaloons. Father's old high hat was commandeered for the director and trainer and the clowns' hats were made of paper. Trousers rolled above the knee represented the tights of the acrobats. Faces were whitened with the help of powder and lard. Cheeks and lips were painted with beet-root juice, and coal served to mark the eyebrows and the triangles on the cheeks of the clowns. The performance would begin in good order and invariably ended with a scandal raised by my eldest brother, after which the performance broke up and the audience left. A sourness would remain in the soul, and the long, long monotonous days, evenings, and nights of the school week would stretch before us. Again we would create a bright perspective for the following Sunday, without which we felt we could not live through the week. We hoped that because one Sunday had passed without entertainment we might count on being taken to the circus or the theatre.

Another Sunday would come around, and again there would be anguish and much guess-work during the day, and joy during dinner. This time it would be the theatre. Going there was not at all like going to the circus: it was a much more serious matter. Mother herself was in charge of such expeditions. We would be washed, dressed in silk Russian shirts, velvet trousers, and chamois boots. White gloves would be pulled on our hands, and a strict command would be given that the gloves remain white on our return from the theatre, and not become completely black, as was usually the case. All evening we would walk about with outstretched fingers, holding our palms as far as possible from our bodies, so as not to soil the gloves. But now and then we would forget ourselves, and seize a piece of chocolate, or crush a programme whose large black print was still wet, or rub the soiled velvet barrier of the box from excitement, and our gloves would immediately become a dark gray with black spots.

Mother herself would put on her visiting dress and become unusually beautiful. (I loved to sit in her room and watch her dressing her hair.) This time the children of the poor relatives and servants were also taken along. One carriage was not enough, and several vehicles trailed each other, giving our expedition the appearance of a picnicking party. A special board was placed between two chairs, and about eight children were seated on it. They looked like sparrows perching on a fence. In the back of the box sat the nurse, the governess and the maids, and in the entrance Mother prepared a snack for the intermission and poured out tea, brought along for the children in special bottles. Acquaintances would drop in to have a chat. We would be introduced, but all our attention would be focussed on the gilded magnificence of the Bolshoi Theatre. The smell of gas, used in those days to illuminate theatres and circuses, always had a magic effect on me. This smell, the impressions made on me by the theatre and the delight I received, turned my head.

The huge auditorium and the thousands of spectators that filled the parquet, galleries and boxes, the drone of human voices that only stopped when the curtain went up and revived in the intermissions, the discordant notes as the orchestra would begin tuning up, the gradually darkening house, and the first bars of music, the rising curtain, the great stage on which men looked like dwarfs, the trapdoors, the fire, the stormy waves painted on canvas, the wrecked property ship, scores of big and little fountains, fish and whales that swam at the bottom of the stage sea, caused me to redden, to turn pale, to sweat, to weep, to grow cold, especially when the kidnapped ballet beauty begged the terrible pirate to let her go. I loved ballet, fairy-tales, romances. Transformations, destruction and eruption were also good. The music would thunder, something would crack and fall. This could even be compared to the circus. The most tiresome and unnecessary thing in ballet, I thought, was the dancing. The ballerinas took a pose at the beginning of their number, and I was no longer interested. Not one of the dancers could be compared to my Elvira of the circus.

But there were exceptions. The prima ballerina at that time was a good friend of ours, the wife of one of my father's friends.[4] The fact that I knew a celebrity who was appearing at the Bolshoi Theatre and was the centre of attraction to two thousand spectators tickled my pride. I could speak to her and see her in the same room with myself, while all the others had to be satisfied with admiring her from a distance. Nobody knew what kind of a voice she had; I did. Nobody knew how she lived, what kind of a husband she had and what children; I did. And now she was the Maiden of Hell, the heroine of a ballet, and nothing else so far as the audience was concerned, but she was also my acquaintance. This is why I watched her dancing with respect. During the *corps de ballet* sequences I occupied myself with looking for another friend of mine, my dancing master, and I always wondered how it was that he never forgot all the different steps and movements of the dance that were required of him. In the intermissions I enjoyed thoroughly running up and down the long corridors, halls and numerous foyers, the acoustics of which made the sound of our stamping feet re-echo from the ceilings.

Sometimes, on week-days, we would give an impromptu ballet performance. But we never wasted a Sunday on it. Sunday was set off for the circus. Our governess was the ballet master and musician all rolled in one. We played and danced to her singing. The ballet was called *The Naiad and the Fisherman* and I did not like it. It had love scenes, it was necessary to kiss someone, and I was ashamed. What I wanted was to kill, to save, to sentence, to pardon. But the chief trouble was that for some unknown reason this ballet included a dance which we studied with our dancing master. This smelled of the schoolroom and disgusted me.

PUPPET THEATRE

AFTER MANY HARDSHIPS my friend and I became convinced that further work with amateurs, as we called my brother, my sisters and everyone else–barring ourselves, of course –was impossible, either in the circus or in the ballet. Besides, under the existing arrangements, we had no chance of making use of the most important part of the theatre–the scenery, lighting effects, trapdoors, the sea, fire and storm. It was impossible to reproduce them in an ordinary room with the help of sheets and blankets, with palms and flowers always standing in the parlour. We decided to switch from living actors to actors made of pasteboard, and to begin the construction of a puppet theatre with scenery, effects, and all the theatrical necessities. This would also give us an opportunity to sell tickets.

"Listen, this is not treason to the circus," I said to my friend in my capacity as his future director. "It is a sad necessity."

But the puppet theatre demanded expenditure. We needed a large table to put in the wide doorway while above and beneath it, that is, above and beneath the puppet stage, the openings were covered with sheets. In this manner, the auditorium was in one room, while in the adjacent room, connected with the first by a doorway, was the stage with all its accessories. It was there that we worked–the artistes, the designers, the producers and the inventors of all sorts of stage effects. My eldest brother also joined us; he could draw very well and was quite an expert at thinking up tricks. His help was also important because he had some savings, and we needed capital for our work. A cabinet-maker, whom I had known ever since I remember, for he was continually employed about the house, took pity on us, and made us a cheap table and agreed to be paid by instalments.

"Christmas is close at hand, and then there will be Easter," we said, persuading him. "We will be given money and pay you."

We began to paint scenery even before the table was ready. At first we did it on wrapping-paper which tore and crumpled, but we did not lose heart, for we thought that with time, as soon as we became rich (for we were to charge ten kopeks in silver as admission), we would buy pasteboard and glue the painted wrapping-paper to it. We did not risk asking our parents for money because we were afraid they might not like the idea, thinking that it was distracting us from our studies. From the moment that we began to feel ourselves managers, producers and directors of the new theatre that was being built according to our plans, our life became full. There was something to think about every minute. There was always something to do.

The only impediment was study. In the desk there was always some piece of theatrical work, the figure of a puppet which had to be painted and dressed, a bit of scenery, a bush, a tree, or the plan and sketches for a new production. On the desk lay our books, but inside there was always some bit of scenery. The moment the governess or the tutor went out for a second, the scenery would be out on the desk, screened by a book or placed inside. When the tutor returned we would turn a page–and the thing was gone. In the margins of our books and copy-books there were always sketches of *mises-en-scène.* And no one could ever guess whether it was scenery or a geometrical drawing.

We staged many operas and ballets, or rather acts from them. We always chose climatic moments: for instance, an act from *The Corsair* which called for a sea calm in the day, but stormy at night, a sinking ship and the heroes swimming for their lives, a lighthouse, an escape from a watery grave, the rising of the moon, prayer, and dawn; or that scene from Pushkin's *The Stone Guest* which showed the appearance of the Commandor, the descent of Don Juan into the inferno, with flames rising from a trapdoor (baby talcum powder), with the destruction of the house turning the stage into a burning hell, in which fire and smoke were the chief ingredients. More than once the scenery burned and had to be replaced by a new one. We staged a ballet called *Robert and Bertram,* about two thieves who left their prison at night and robbed peaceful burgesses. These performances always attracted a full house. Many people came to see them–some to encourage us, others to amuse themselves.

Our faithful admirer, the old book-keeper, did everything he could to advertise our new theatre. He brought his entire family and his friends. We did not have to think up work for ourselves in the box-office. There was enough to do there as it was, and even more work backstage. The box-office opened in the evening, just before the performance. Once, because there were too many people, we were forced to move to a larger room, but the artistic side of the performance suffered from this, and we were punished for our greed.

We decided that we must occupy ourselves with art, for art's sake, not for money.

Now we spent our Sundays happily without the circus or the theatre. And when we were asked to choose between the two, we chose the theatre. Not because we had betrayed the circus, but because our puppet show demanded that we go to the theatre and see its productions, learn, and get fresh material for our own creations.

Our promenades between lessons took on a very deep meaning. Before that we used to go to Kuznetsky Most Street to buy photographs of circus artistes, searching for some that we did not have in our collection. But with the opening of our theatre there appeared a need for all sorts of material for scenery and puppets. We were no longer too lazy to take a walk, as we had been before. We bought all sorts of pictures, books with landscapes and costumes, and used them as material for the scenery and the *dramatis personae* of our theatre. These were the first volumes of my future library.

THE ITALIAN OPERA

FATHER AND MOTHER started taking my brother and me to the Italian opera when we were quite young, but we did not care for it. Opera shows were added attractions, so to say, and we always begged them not to take them into account, to the detriment of, say, the circus. Music bored us. Nevertheless, I am deeply grateful to my parents for having made me listen to music when I was young. I am sure that it has had a beneficent effect on my hearing, on my taste and on my eye, which got accustomed to all that was beautiful in the theatre. We had a ticket for the whole season, i.e., for some forty or fifty performances, and we always occupied a box near the orchestra. The Italian opera left an indelible impression—and a much deeper one, I must confess, than the circus. The reason, I think, is because in those days the effect, tremendous though it was, imprinted itself on me spiritually and physically without my being conscious of it. I really came to understand and appreciate the impression much later on, from my recollections. The circus was a very merry and amusing affair–when I was a child. When I grew up, my recollections of it left me unimpressed and I soon forgot them.

St. Petersburg spent a lot of money on the Italian opera, just as it did on the French and German theatres–only the best French actors and the best singers of the world were engaged.

Notices at the beginning of the season would announce performances by companies made up almost exclusively of world-famous stars: Adelina Patti, Lucca, Nilsson, Volpini, Artôt, Viardot, Tamberlick, Mario, Stanio and later Masini, Cotogni, Padilla, Bagaggiolo, Giametta and Sembrich.

I remember many operas in which I saw the best singers of the world. For instance, here is the cast of Rossini's *Barber of Seville:* Rosina–Patti or Lucca; Almaviva–Nicolini, Capoul, Masini; Figaro–Cotogni, Padilla; Don Basilio–Giametta; Bartolo–the famous comedian and basso-buffe Bossi. I wonder whether any other European city had ever permitted itself such a luxury!

The Italian opera performances impressed me not only spiritually, but physically as well. In fact, every time I recall them I relive the feeling I had experienced when I first heard Patti's supernatural, silvery high notes, her coloratura and technique that made me hold my breath, her full-chest tones that left me stunned and thrilled. And I remember her perfect little figure and her beautiful goddess-like profile.

The same physical thrill passes through me when I think of that king of baritones Cotogni and the basso Giametta. That feeling is strong in me. I remember a charity concert in a friend's house. It took place in a small hall and the two "giants" sang the duet from *The Puritan* filling the place with intoxicating, velvety notes. Giametta was a man with a beautiful physique and the face of Mephistopheles, and Cotogni had an open, kindly face with a big scar on his cheek–a healthy, lively and handsome man.

Cotogni made an unforgettable impression on me. In 1911, some thirty-five years later, I was walking with a friend through some narrow alley in Rome. Suddenly, from the top floor of a house, there floated a note–strong, ringing, tempestuous and exciting. The physical feeling I knew so well again surged in me.

"Cotogni!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, he lives here," my friend replied. "But how did you recognize him?" he added, surprised.

"I felt him. I'll never forget his voice."

I also have the same physical recollection of the powerful voices of baritones Bagaggiolo and Grazzini, of the dramatic sopranos Artôt and Nilsson, and later of Tamagno. And I shall always remember the fascinating voices of Lucca, Volpini and Masini.

But there are impressions of quite another sort that live in me despite the fact that I was then too young to appreciate them. These are impressions of an aesthetic value. I remember the marvellous manner in which tenor Naudin sang although he had no voice to speak of. Yet he was one of the best vocalists I had ever had the good fortune of hearing. He was old and ugly, yet we children liked him more than young singers. I also remember the polished diction (although I was a child then and did not understand Italian) of baritone Padilla when he sang in Mozart's *Don Juan* or in *The Barber of Seville.* These were all impressions that had implanted themselves deeply in my childhood, but were appreciated much later. I shall never forget the clear, polished, exquisite and rhythmic timbre of tenor Capoul (a splendid singer and creator of a fashionable haircut).

But to the shame of our music lovers, they repaid badly for the luxury they were given. It was they who introduced the bad habit of coming late to the theatre, sitting down noisily when the singers were thrilling the audience with a silver-like high note. It was all reminiscent of a conceited maid-of-all-work who thinks it is chic to ignore and ridicule everything.

Then there was another custom, and an even worse one. Society men, holders of season tickets, would spend practically the whole evening at their clubs playing cards and come to the theatre just to hear the *high C* of a famous tenor. The orchestra seats usually remained vacant until the moment when the singer was in the middle of his famous aria. Then these gentlemen would rush in noisily. The singer would negotiate the difficult note, repeat the song—and then the gentlemen would leave the theatre, just as noisily, to return to their card game. People like that had neither taste nor manners.

Vocal art was on the downgrade, little attention was paid to voice training or diction. The craze for Italian operas revived towards the end of the 19th century. The private opera company organized by that patron of arts S. I. Mamontov included some excellent foreign singers, many of them proving themselves also extremely talented actors. Of course, they did not make such a great impression on those who remembered such outstanding singers as Patti, Lucca and Cotogni. Chaliapin was an exception, he was in a class of his own. There were some other exceptionally fine voices. The famous tenor Tamagno, for instance. He got little publicity before his Moscow début. People expected to hear a good singer–that's all. The huge, powerfully built Tamagno, appearing as Othello, deafened the audience with his very first note. The spectators, instinctively dropped back in their chairs as if seeking to escape suffering a shock. The second note was even more powerful, the third and the fourth all the more so, and when the final note left his lips the audience seemed stunned. Then we all jumped up. Friends looked for friends, people spoke to strangers, everyone was asking: "Did you hear that? What was that?" The orchestra ceased playing, there was confusion on the stage. And, spontaneously, the whole crowd rushed towards the stage, roaring in its rapture for an encore.

On his next visit Tamagno sang at the Bolshoi Theatre, on the tsar's birthday, and the performance started with the hymn. The orchestra was playing in the strongest forte, the choir and the soloists were singing at the top of their voices. Suddenly, from behind, came one thunderous note, then the second and the third. They drowned the orchestra and the choir, they made people forget that there were musicians and singers. The notes came from Tamagno, who had been hidden behind. He was not very musical, was often out of tune, out of rhythm. But he was not untalented. That was why one could work miracles with him. His Othello was one. He made a wonderful Moor, both musically and dramatically. For many years (yes, years) he studied this part with such geniuses as Verdi himself (for music) and old man Tommaso Salvini (for drama).

Let young actors remember that one can achieve wonderful results through effort, technique and real art. Tamagno was great in that rôle not only because he had two geniuses for teachers, but also because he was gifted, temperamental and sincere. His excellent teachers, masters of technique, were able to discover his spiritual talent. He himself could do nothing. He was taught to play the rôle, but he was not taught to understand and master stage art.

I speak of all these impressions because, to understand my book, it is necessary for the reader to live with me through the impressions made on me by the sound, music, rhythm and voice. They played a big role in my career. I came to realize that quite recently. I realized how much spontaneous impressions meant for me. They were the element that recently led me to the study of the voice, its placement, the polishing of sound and diction, improvement of the rhythm of musical intonation of vowels and consonants, words and phrases and monologues. All that is required for dramatic art. I shall dwell on it later. Now I want the reader to know the impressions made on me by music.

I also mention these reminiscences to show young actors how important it is to have as many deep impressions as possible. The actor must see (and not only see but understand) all that is beautiful in all the spheres of his own and other people's art and life. He needs impressions of good plays and performances, concerts, museums, journeys, paintings of all schools, academic and futuristic, for no one knows what will thrill him and reveal his talent.

PRANKS

THE ACTOR MUST LIVE among people and draw from them the necessary creative material.

Fate has been kind to me all through my life—it has surrounded me with people and society. To begin with, I began my life at a time when there was considerable animation in the spheres of art, science and aesthetics. In Moscow this was due to a great degree to young merchants who were interested not only in their businesses, but also in art.

Take, for instance, Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov, the founder of the famous Picture Gallery which he presented to Moscow. He worked at his office or factory from morning till night and then went to his gallery or spoke to young artists whom he thought talented. And a year or two later their pictures would find their way to his gallery and they themselves become known and then famous. Yet how modest Tretyakov was! Who would recognize the Russian Medici in this shy, modest, tall and thin man with the appearance of a clergyman? Instead of resting in summer, he would go familiarizing himself with paintings and museums in Europe and after that, according to the preconceived plan he followed all his life, he would tramp some country–he covered the whole of Germany and France and part of Spain, all on foot.

Another manufacturer K. T. Soldatenkov dedicated himself to publishing books that could not be put out in mass editions but that were nevertheless necessary either for science or for cultural and educational purposes. His beautiful Greek-style house was turned into a library. There were no festive lights in its windows. The two windows of his study, however, were always lighted and remained so long after midnight.

M. V. Sabashnikov, like Soldatenkov, patronized literature and founded an excellent publishing house.

S. I. Shchukin amassed a collection of modernistic French paintings and his gallery was open to all who wanted to familiarize themselves with fine arts. His brother, P. I. Shchukin, founded a big museum of Russian antiques.

Alexei Alexandrovich Bakhrushin established, with his own money, the only Russian theatrical museum for which he collected everything that was in any way connected with Russian and West-European stage art.

Then there was Savva Ivanovich Mamontov, one of the greatest champions of Russian culture, a man of extraordinary talent, energy and sweep. He was a singer, an opera actor, a producer and a playwright all rolled in one. He was the creator of the Russian private opera, a patron of arts like Tretyakov and a builder of many Russian railways.

But I shall speak of him in greater detail later on, just as I shall of another patron of the theatre, Savva Timofeyevich Morozov, who was one of the founders of the Art Theatre.

The people I was closely associated with also helped me to develop an artistic soul. You could not call them talented, but they knew how to work, rest and make merry.

We admired Kuzma Prutkov[5] and loved a good prank.

The estate next to ours belonged to my cousins S. They were well-educated people, progressive and had made themselves a name as textile manufacturers. It was always noisy and gay in their house. In the evenings there would be discussions about *zemstvo* and municipal activities. On holidays there were hunting parties and before that sharp-shooting contests. The guns would continue rattling from 12 noon to sundown. The hunting season began in the middle of July–first the men hunted game, then wolves, bears and foxes. The hunters would gather early on Sundays or holidays, the horn would be sounded, the servants would go off with the dogs, the hunters would follow in carriages, singing lustily, and the procession would be rounded off by a cart with food-stuffs. We youngsters were not taken along, but nevertheless got up early to see the hunters off; we certainly envied them. We liked inspecting the game they bagged. The hunters would take baths and in the evening there were parties with music, dancing, *petits jeux* and other entertainment. Sometimes the families would get together and arrange swimming competitions in the day, boating in the evening. Ahead there usually was a big boat with a brass band of about 30 musicians.

On St. John's night everybody–small and big–went to the "magic" forest. People disguised themselves, donned bed sheets and scared those who came to look for fern leaves. The moment the latter would approach, the former would jump down from trees or appear from behind bushes. Some of the disguised people stood motionless in the boats that drifted down the river. Their ghostly appearance (they had long white tails) always created a strong impression.

Some of the jokes we played were cruel. One day we chose our young German music teacher for our victim. He was naïve like a fourteen-year-old girl and believed everything he was told. We told him that a hefty peasant woman had come to the village, that she had fallen madly in love with him and was looking for him. That night he came to his room, undressed and was about to lie down when he saw a big woman lying in his bed. The young German jumped out of the window in his night-shirt. Happily, it was not very high. Our dog saw the bare feet, the white night-shirt, and attacked him. The poor man yelled for the whole estate to hear. People woke up, sleepy faces appeared in the windows, women shrieked. But the company that had played the joke and knew what it was all about, saved the poor man. In the meantime, the joker who was impersonating the peasant woman jumped out of the bed, deliberately leaving an article of female clothing. The secret remained a secret and the myth about the peasant woman continued to scare the young man who, incidentally, later became a well-known musician. He would have probably been driven mad were it not for Father. He intervened and put an end to the joke.

Like our elders we too were infected with the love of practical joking, which fathered theatrical stunts. Our Lyubimovka estate was in the midst of a summer residential section. The vacationers would pass by our very windows whenever they happened to be rowing up or down the river. The constant noise and singing gave us no peace. We decided to frighten away the unbidden guests. And this is what we did: we bought a large bull's bladder, put a wig on it, drew eyes, a nose, a mouth and ears in the proper places, and made it look like the yellow face of a drowned man or some sea monster. To the bladder we tied a long rope which we passed through the handles of two dumb-bells and dropped them into the river. Pulling on the rope, we sank the bladder to the bottom and tied the rope in some bushes, where we also hid. It was only necessary to untie the rope, and the bladder would leap from below the surface of the water like some strange and unheard-of monster. We waited for the vacationers to come rowing down the river. As soon as they approached near enough, a hairy monster would suddenly appear from the water and just as suddenly disappear. The effect was terrific.

We boys not only assimilated and reflected our family life, but also reacted in our own way to what was happening beyond the walls of the estate. We often reflected these impressions through various creative processes–by pretending we were other people or by presenting a life that was different from the one at home. For instance, with the introduction of conscription in Russia, we also organized an army among boys of our own age. There were even two armies: my brother led one, I led the other. The supreme commander of the two armies was the same person, a friend of my father's. He gave the word, and many ten-year-old boys turned up from the surrounding villages. Everything was organized as it should be. In the beginning we were all equals. All were privates, and there was one commander who was to train noncommissioned officers and then commission them.

There was a great deal of competition. Each of us wanted to show that he understood military affairs and could become an officer. Some of the cleverer boys showed themselves strong competitors, and in the very beginning went ahead of us in the matter of military art. But when the programme was extended and it was announced that every soldier must learn to read and write, my brother and I were ordered to instruct the rest and were made noncoms.

We were made noncoms on the day our manoeuvres began. We led the two opposing forces into which the army was divided. As the entire army was excitedly waiting for the battle to begin, standing in serried ranks, a hunter's horn was heard in the distance, a sound very reminiscent of a fanfare, and a horseman who was a guest of one of our neighbours galloped into the courtyard. He was clad in a very strange attire which evidently was supposed to be Persian, with a white skirt that reached to his knees. He dismounted, bowed in the Eastern manner to the commander-in-chief, greeted us in the name of his sovereign and informed us that the "Persian Shah" and his court would honour us with a visit. Soon we saw in the distance a procession in white bathrobes and night-shirts, with turbans made out of white towels, and red belts. Among them there were people clad in magnificent Bokhara robes (from the museum treasures of the brothers S., the manufacturers of silks and tapestries). The "Shah" himself was clad in a very rich Eastern robe with a real Eastern turban and wonderful weapons from the museum. He came on our old white horse, which had not lost its beauty. The "Shah" was riding under a gorgeous umbrella with tassels, fringes and gold-embroidered velvet pinned to it.

On the terrace in front of the courtyard where the exercises were to take place, there magically appeared a throne ornamented with Eastern carpets and cloth. The stairs leading from the yard to the terrace and the throne were also carpeted. Someone brought flags to decorate the terrace.

The "Shah," who did not want to walk because he considered it below his dignity, was ceremoniously taken off the horse, carried to the terrace and placed on the throne. We recognized our cousin.

The parade began. We marched past the reviewing stand. The "Shah" shouted some terrible and incomprehensible words, which were supposed to be Persian. The courtiers sang for some reason, bowed very low, and walked around and around the throne. My brother and I and all the other boys were excited.

After the parade there were the manoeuvres. We were told the positions of the two enemy armies, our strategical plan, and put in our places. Then began a series of surrounding movements, ambushes, sallies, and at last the battle proper. Heated by the solemn circumstances we began to fight. There was already one casualty–a black eye. But–

At the height of the battle, Mother suddenly appeared in the very midst of the fray. She energetically waved her parasol, separating the fighting boys, and shouted so authoritatively that the engagement came to an abrupt end. Having put both armies to rout she began to scold us and our elders. No one escaped her tongue. The "Persian Shah" left his throne and approached us.

"I declare war on Persia!" suddenly cried one of the boys. The two armies joined forces and rushed at the "Shah." He screamed. We roared. He took to his heels. We followed him. At last we caught him, surrounded him, and began to pinch him. This time the "Shah" roared, but no longer in jest. He roared in real earnest. But Mother reappeared on the horizon with her parasol, and the allied army beat a hasty retract.

STUDIES

IN ACCORDANCE with the patriarchal custom of that time, our education began at home. Our parents spared no money and set up a real gymnasium at home. From early morning to late evening, one teacher would succeed another, and in the breaks between lessons we would occupy ourselves with fencing, dancing, skating, and other physical exercises. There were Russian, French and German teachers for girls and boys. Moreover, we boys had an excellent tutor by the name of Vincent, a Swiss who was an accomplished gymnast, fencer and horseman. This man, with his splendid personality, played a tremendous part in my life. He begged our parents to let us go to the gymnasium, but Mother, who loved us too much, would not even entertain the idea. She feared that other boys, strong and cruel, would beat us, her helpless little angels. She imagined that the teachers would lock us up for being naughty. She thought conditions in the gymnasium were terrible and was afraid we would catch some disease.

However, the conscription law provided for exemptions on educational grounds. This made my mother surrender, and when I was thirteen years old, I took entrance examinations to the third form in one of the Moscow gymnasiums. So that God might make me wise enough to pass the impending purgatory, my nurse hung a little bag with mud from Mount Athos around my neck, and my mother and sisters gave me holy images. Instead of getting into the third form, I got into the first–and even then only after a lot of trouble. I tried hard to write my composition and tugged helplessly at the button on my chest and in the end made a hole in the little bag, and the holy mud ran out. At home the hopeless scholar was severely scolded and sent to the bathroom, where I cried as I washed the mud off.

I was almost as tall then as I am now, and my class-mates were mostly short. The contrast was so piquant that it attracted the attention of all those who visited the class. Whether it was the head master who came in, or the superintendent–I knew beforehand that I would be called to recite. The smaller I tried to make myself, the worse it was. I only formed the habit of hunching my back and shoulders.

I went to the gymnasium at the time classical languages were a fad. Many foreign instructors and professors came to Russia and filled all our institutions of learning, often trying to cram us with knowledge that was alien to Russians.

The head master of the gymnasium was a silly crank. He added the letter "s" almost to every word he uttered. When he entered the class, he would say something like this:

"Good morning-s, young men-s. Today-s we shall have *extemporale*-s. But first let us go through *recensium*-s *verborum*-s."

Sitting at his desk, he would clean his ears with a pen and then wipe it with a piece of cloth he always carried for the purpose.

May God forgive him his sins because he was a kind man. I hold no grudge against him.

The inspector was a foreigner too. Imagine a tall, lean man, bald, with a head shaped like that of a degenerate, pale, with a long nose, a very thin

Stanislavsky (left) with his mother and brother Vladimir (1866)

face, blue glasses concealing his eyes, a long beard that reached almost to his stomach, drooping moustaches over his lip, big ears, a short neck, narrow shoulders, no stomach whatever (he always kept one hand on it), thin legs, and a creeping gait. His voice seemed to come from inside, uttering just one vowel and swallowing all the other letters. He had a knack of gliding unnoticed into the class-room and blurting out:

"Staaaaa! Siiii!"

That meant: "Stand up! Sit down!"

I still don't know whether it was to punish us or make us exercise that he would repeatedly make us stand up and sit down. Then he would belch out some incomprehensible oath and leave the class just as unnoticeably as he had come in.

At other times, when we would be playing, during the big break, he would appear like a ghost in our midst and utter a few separate vowels:

"All wiii. . . . luuu."

That meant we had to go without lunch. We would be led into the dining-room, but had to remain standing while the others ate. There would be protests by other boys, who usually brought us pies, candy and sandwiches, thus turning punishment into a picnic. I hated his kind of punishment, the way he treated children, and shall always hate it.

Children were locked up for the least offence, and sometimes for absolutely nothing. There were rats in the lock-up, and it was rumoured that they were deliberately bred . . . to make punishment seem real, from the pedagogic view-point.

Our studies boiled down to cramming Latin grammar rules and learning by rote poems and their translations into broken Russian.

I must admit, in all fairness, that some of my friends graduated from the gymnasium with a good store of knowledge and even pleasant memories of the days they had spent there. But I was never good at learning by heart. The job was too much for my memory, it exhausted and spoiled it for all time. As an actor, who needs a good memory, I hold the gymnasium responsible for damaging it and always think of my school-days with bitterness.

As for knowledge, the gymnasium gave me none. Even today my heart aches every time I recall the nights of agony I spent cramming grammar and poems in Greek and Latin: midnight, the candle is burning out, I sit fighting against sleep and racking my brain trying to memorize a long list of disconnected words that have to be recited in the order given. My memory is like an over-soaked sponge, it cannot take in anything. And I have several more pages to learn. If I don't know them, there will be a lot of shouting, bad marks, perhaps punishment, but worst of all the horror of standing before a teacher who looks at you with humiliating disdain!

Our patience finally exhausted itself and Father took pity on us.

We were sent to another gymnasium, completely different from the one from which we had fled. There were impossible things there too, but of another kind. Here is what happened there a few weeks before we joined it: the inspector, a handsome ladies' man, entered the dormitory. One of the pupils, an Easterner, hurled a log at him with the intention of breaking his leg. Fortunately, he failed. The inspector spent several days in bed, the pupil in the lock-up. There was a woman in the case, and the affair was hushed up.

On another occasion, we were in class when we heard someone singing in a distance to the accompaniment of an accordion. No one paid any attention to that, thinking it was someone singing in the street. Then we realized that the music came from a box-room near by. One of the pupils had returned to the gymnasium drunk and was locked up in the box-room to sober up.

Many teachers were real cranks. One of them, for instance, made his appearance in class differently each time: the door would open and the class journal, into which teachers wrote down marks and remarks, would come flying in, to be followed by the comedian teacher himself. At other times, he would unexpectedly turn up before the bell, when we were still running about the class and playing, scare us into our seats, disappear just as suddenly and then reappear several minutes after the bell.

The priest who taught us the Bible was a crank too, and a naïve one at that. We used his lesson to polish up on our Latin and Greek. In order to distract him, one of the pupils, a clever, well-read boy, would usually tell the old man that there was no God.

"Stop sinning, stop sinning!" the old priest would shout in alarm and would there and then begin to save the soul of the sinner. He would launch on a lengthy sermon, almost convince the boy—only to have another question, and one even more blasphemous than the first, fired at him. The whole lesson would pass in such a fashion. We rewarded our class-mate for his dexterity and zeal by giving him liver pies which we received for breakfast.

Graduation exams were conducted with all strictness and we were especially afraid of written Greek and Latin. They were held in the old, round auditorium. The graduating pupils, there were a dozen of us, were seated separately, some distance from one another. There was usually a teacher at each desk, seeing to it that we did not copy from one another. In the centre of the auditorium stood a long table around which sat the head master, the in-

Stanislavsky at the age of ten (1873)

spector, the teacher, his assistant, etc. And yet we all had the same mistakes. The members of the examination council racked their brains trying to figure out the trick. They even contemplated re-examining the whole lot, but re-examination would have embarrassed the head master and the teachers, who had no explanation whatever to offer. What was the secret? Only one pupil knew the subject well. The rest, instead of preparing for the exam, spent their time studying the deaf-and-dumb alphabet. We devoted several evenings to it. The one who knew, signalled to us before the very eyes of the examination council. Many years later, I met my Greek teacher and he begged me to tell him the secret.

"Never!" I answered, gloating with joy. "I shall pass on this secret to my children if you don't make school years something to remember with pleasure, and not with horror!"

THE MALY THEATRE

SPIRITUALLY, the Maly Theatre exerted a greater influence on me than the gymnasium. It taught me to see and understand all that is beautiful. And what can be more useful than developing one's aesthetic feelings and taste?

I prepared myself for every Maly Theatre performance. For this purpose we young people organized a circle which met to read each play produced by the theatre, study all that was written about the play, and form our own opinions. We would then go together to the Maly, and exchange our impressions. Then we would go to see the play again and discuss it anew. Very often these discussions proved our ignorance of the various problems of art and knowledge. We tried to make good our ignorance by arranging lectures. The Maly Theatre became the lever which controlled the spiritual and intellectual side of our life.

We admired the Maly Theatre and idolized its actors and actresses.

I saw the wonderfully, extraordinarily talented actors of the Maly Theatre in all their glory. Spoiled in my childhood by the Italian opera that consisted only of stars, I was spoiled in my youth by the wealth of talent in the Maly Theatre.

Have you ever noticed that in theatrical life there are long, torturing periods of inactivity during which no new and talented writers appear on the horizon, no actors, no stage directors? And then suddenly, unexpectedly, nature spews forth a whole theatrical troupe—with a writer and a stage director to boot—that creates a miracle, a theatrical epoch.

Then there appear successors to the great men who have created the epoch. They accept the tradition and pass it on to the next generation. But tradition is capricious, it takes on strange forms, just like Maeterlinck's blue bird, and becomes a trade, with only one seed of it, the most important one, retaining life till the new rejuvenation of the theatre, which takes the inherited seed of the great eternal and creates its own and new eternal. In turn this eternal is passed on to the next generation and most of it is lost on the way, with the exception of a small seed which finds its way into the world treasure-house of human art.

The Russian theatre has had some exceptionally talented troupes. In Shchepkin's day, these companies included such great actors and actresses as Karatygin, Mochalov, Sosnitsky, Shumsky, Samarin, Samoilov, the Sadovskys, Nikulina-Kositskaya, Jivokini, Akimova, the Vasilyevs, the great Martynov and Nikulina. Some of them, like Shchepkin and Samarin, illiterate in the beginning, educated themselves and became friends with Gogol, Belinsky, Aksakov, Herzen and Turgenev. Later life pushed to the fore another talented group which included Fedotova, Yermolova, Varlamov, Davydov and Yuzhin.

I remember Vasily Jivokini. He would come out on the stage and walk right to the footlights to greet the audience. He was invariably given an ovation and only after this did he begin to play. This action, which seems incompatible in a serious theatre, he could not be denied, for it fitted his artistic personality. The meeting with the beloved actor filled each spectator with joy. Jivokini was given ovations because he was Jivokini, because he lived in our time, because he afforded us moments of wonderful happiness that brighten up life, because he was so lively and gay, because everybody loved him. But the same Jivokini could be tragically serious at the most comic and even farcical moments. He knew the secret of making seriousness ridiculous. When he began to suffer, to run about the stage, to call for help in a most natural manner, he was unbearably funny in his serious reaction to trifles. The face and the mimetics of this comedian cannot be described. He was an enchantingly ugly man whom one wanted to kiss, to caress, to love. His kindness and restfulness on the stage were an example of eternal, universal kindness and restfulness.

Another genius that I remember very well is Shumsky. With what world-famous artiste can he be compared? I think with Coquelin,[6] insofar as artistry, interpretation and polish are concerned. But Shumsky possessed one advantage: he was always sincere. In that he was superior to any French Sganarelle.

He could play in comedy and tragedy with equal finesse, artistry and aristocratism.

Samarin, who made a splendid French dandy in his youth, was a charmingly handsome aristocrat in his later years, greatly aided by his unusual voice, diction, rare manners and temperament.

I remember Medvedeva[7] well not only as an actress but as an interesting type. To a certain degree she was my teacher, and as such she exercised a great deal of influence over me. In her youth she was considered a fair-to-middling *ingénue;* later on she reached her real forte on the stage in character rôles—and she found in herself the bright touches that enabled her to create unforgettable characters. She was a character actress by the grace of God. Even in private life she could not live a single hour without impersonating the characters she saw about her. When she told you she had had a visitor who expressed such and such a thought, you at once saw who had been there and how he said what he said.

Once I witnessed a characteristic scene in her house. She was ill and could not appear in a new play at the Maly Theatre. Knowing that she was worried to death by the thought that another actress was taking her place in a new rôle, I went to visit the old woman with the idea of mitigating her ordeal. Her apartment was empty: everyone had gone to the theatre. The only person who had remained at home was an ancient woman who lived on Medvedeva's charity. I knocked at the door and quietly entered the parlour. Medvedeva, dishevelled, was sitting in the centre of the room. Her appearance frightened me for I thought that something had happened to her, but she reassured me:

"You see, I'm acting. It is time for an old fool like me to die, but I am still acting. I suppose I'll be acting in my coffin too."

"What are you playing?" I was interested.

"A fool," she answered and went on to explain: "A fool, either a cook or a simple peasant woman, who has come to see a doctor with a package of vegetables. She sits down and looks about her: there is a picture hanging on the wall, a mirror. She looks into it, sees herself and begins to laugh. She pushes her hair under the shawl—see—that one in the mirror is doing the same thing. She can't restrain herself, she smiles."

And Medvedeva smiled foolishly—as foolishly as could be imagined.

"The doctor comes out and calls her in. She enters another room, taking the vegetables with her. 'What's the trouble with you?' he asks. 'Where is the pain?' 'I swallowed it.' 'What did you swallow?' 'I swallowed a nail.' 'A big one?' 'Like that.' And she shows a long nail. 'You would have died, old woman,' says the doctor, 'if you had swallowed such a nail.' 'Die? No, I'm still alive.' 'And how do you feel?' 'Well, it's coming out here, and here and over there,' and the old woman points to various parts of her body. 'All right, undress.' The doctor walks out, and the woman begins to undress. She takes off her coat, her shawl, her blouse, her skirt, her shirt; she tries to take off her shoes, but cannot, her stomach is in the way. She sits down on the floor, takes one shoe off, then the other; pulls off a stocking, helping herself with the free foot. She is naked now, and begins to get up, but can't. At last she rises, sits down on a chair, folds her hands, and sits, like this."

Medvedeva's acting almost persuaded me that a naked woman was sitting before me.

One of Medvedeva's characteristics was her almost childish straightforwardness–a quality that manifested itself at the most unexpected moments. Here is one illustration of this peculiarity, and of her power of observation that is so essential to a character actress, and Medvedeva was undoubtedly one. In her old age, Medvedeva was granted a pension and she was so grateful that she idolized Alexander III. When he died, the ailing old woman insisted on seeing the procession when the body was brought to Moscow. Her doctors considered this too dangerous for her heart, but gave in to her insistence. A window was rented in Myasnitskaya Street, where the procession was to pass, and Medvedeva was taken there early in the morning, accompanied by doctors and relatives. Everyone was worried, for her heart was weak and it was feared that the sight of the procession might prove the last stroke. When the procession appeared, the old woman shook with excitement, and the doctors got ready: one had a mixture ready, another was preparing to give her drops, a third was holding a phial with ammonia. The moment was tense. And then, unexpectedly, Medvedeva cried out joyously, almost with childish enthusiasm:

"What a back, what a back!"

She was referring to the coachman of the hearse and was so struck by his back that she missed seeing the casket. The artistic instinct and the power of observation of this character actress had got the better of her patriotic feelings.

In tenderness Alexander Lensky of the Maly Theatre could, perhaps, be compared only with Vasily Kachalov. I was in love with Lensky: in love with his languid, pensive blue eyes, his gait, his plasticity, his extraordinarily expressive and beautiful hands, his charming tenor voice, his polished diction and his accomplishments in the theatre, fine arts, sculpture and literature. In my time I emulated (unsuccessfully) his merits and (successfully) his shortcomings.

I shall say only a few words about Glikeria Fedotova, for I shall speak of her and of the influence she exerted over me in greater detail later on. Fedotova was unusually talented, an artiste to her finger-tips, an excellent interpreter of the spiritual essence of the play, the very embodiment of the character she was portraying. So far as acting technique was concerned, she was a brilliant virtuoso.

This does not exhaust the list of the great actors and actresses who impressed me and served me as models. There were, for instance, Maria Savina, Olga and Prov Sadovsky, Polina Strepetova, Nadezhda Nikulina, Yelena Leshkovskaya and many foreign artistes.

Lack of space does not permit me to speak in detail of Alexander Yuzhin and other actors and actresses who began their artistic career in my time.

But I must make an exception for one who recently left us and explain how much she meant to me. I mean Yermolova.

Maria Yermolova embodied a whole theatrical epoch; for our generation she was a symbol of womanliness, beauty, power, pathos, sincere simplicity and modesty. She possessed exceptional talents: subtle understanding, inspired temperament, susceptibility, inexhaustible spiritual force. She played almost uninterruptedly for fifty years in Moscow. Not a character actress, she appeared on the stage almost daily in rôles in which she played herself. And yet, despite all that, Yermolova always managed to make every rôle different from the other.

Her portrayals continue to live in one's memory, although they were all moulded from one and the same organic material and all reflect her wholesome spiritual individuality.

In contrast, other actresses of her type are remembered only for their personality, not for their rôles, which are all alike and all remind one of the actress who played them.

Maria Yermolova created her numerous, spiritually different rôles with the same methods, methods that were all her own, with the aid of her original gestures, tempestuousness, vivacity and liveliness, volcanic passion and wonderful ability to cry and suffer sincerely on the stage.

She was just as remarkable physically: she had a wonderful face with sparkling eyes, the figure of Venus, a beautiful, deep voice, plasticity, harmony and rhythm in her movements, even when they were jerky, unusual charm, and stage appeal which could turn shortcomings into merits.

All her movements, words, actions–even when unsuccessful or mistaken–were fired with her warm, tender and at times passionate feelings. In addition to all that, nature had endowed her with exceptional psychological sensitiveness. She knew woman's heart and like no other actress she knew how to reveal and portray "das ewig Weibliche,"* as well as all the curves of a woman's soul that can be touching to the point of tears, frightful to the point of horror and funny to the point of laughter. How often this great actress made one and all cry. But to judge the force and influence of her acting it was necessary to play with her. I had this joy, honour and bliss when I appeared with her in Nizhny-Novgorod in Ostrovsky's *The Dowerless Bride.* It was an unforgettable performance, and for a moment it seemed to me that I was a genius. And no wonder, one could not help being infected with Yermolova's talent as one stood beside her on the stage.

I was personally acquainted with Maria Yermolova and I was surprised how sincerely ignorant she was of her own grandeur. She was unnaturally timid, shy and modest. It was enough for someone to offer her a new part and she would redden, jump up, grab at a life-saving cigarette, light it nervously, and say abruptly, in her deep voice:

"What are you saying? God bless you! How can I? I don't suit the part! Why try something that is beyond me? Aren't there enough other young actresses? No, please. . . ."

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* Eternally womanly. (Ger.)

All the great actors and actresses whom I have described here have helped me, in my stage and private life, to create that *ideal of an actor* to which I had striven in my art; they exerted a vast influence on me and fostered my artistic and aesthetic development.[8]

MY DÉBUT

THE LITTLE OUTBUILDING on our estate near Moscow, where I made my stage début at the age of three, rotted away, and everybody was sorry to see it fall into such a state. It was the only place where we could dance, sing and make noise without disturbing anyone. We just could not get along without it. Not only we, but the neighbours, too, bemoaned its fate. At last it was decided to put up a new building with a large hall, which, when necessary, could be transformed into a theatre.[9] I think that Father was guided by his wish to keep us nearer to the paternal hearth. This prompted him to keep in step with the demands of the young people and adapt himself to their life.

Incidentally, this tactic of my parents often led to changes in our life and activity. Here are some illustrations. Father was a well-known philanthropist and built a hospital for peasants. My elder sister fell in love with one of the doctors and the whole house suddenly became interested in medicine. Ailing people came from near and far. Other doctors, friends of my brother-in-law, came from the city. There were amateur actors among them and it was decided to stage a play. And we all turned into actors. Soon my second sister fell in love with a young German merchant. The house filled with foreigners and we all began to speak German, took to horseback riding and racing, and sports. We young people tried to dress in a European fashion and those of us who could, grew side whiskers and changed our haircut. And then one of my brothers fell in love with the daughter of an ordinary Russian merchant, who used to go around in a *poddyovka** and top-boots—and the whole house followed suit. There was always a samovar on the table, we drank tea from morning till night, began to go to church more often than before, held special services, invited the best church choirs and singers. By that time my third sister fell in love with a man who rode a bicycle and we all donned woollen socks, short pants, bought ourselves bicycles–rather first tricycles and then bicycles. Later, my fourth sister fell in love with an opera singer–and the whole house started singing. Among the visitors to our house and estate were such famous singers of the day as Sobinov, Sekar-Rozhansky and Olenin. They sang in the house and they sang in the woods–they sang romances in the day and serenades at night. They sang when they went boating and they sang when they went swimming. Every day at 5, just before dinner, our singer guests would gather to sing at the bathhouse. They would climb to the roof of the bathhouse and start a quartette. Before the final note they would dive into the river and finish the song in the water. The one who did it first won.

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* A sort of a Russian coat.—*Tr.*

Perhaps all these metamorphoses and changes in family life did exert an influence on me as an actor and teach me to incarnate character parts. Who knows?

The new outbuilding was ready and we got a regular little theatre with all facilities, dressing-rooms, etc.

There only remained some show to stage as a house-warming ceremony.

But where were we to find actors and actresses and directors? We had to force our relatives, friends, tutors and governesses into taking part in our play. Some of them were poisoned by the stage and remained actors. For instance, my brother, V. S. Alexeyev,[10] and my sister, Z. S. Sokolova,[11] made their débuts together with me and are still with the theatre. Our house, accustomed to changes, now set out firmly on the path of amateur theatricals and even Father and Mother joined us. Our tutor, a student who considered himself a specialist because he headed a dramatic circle, took stage direction upon himself.

There began the usual amateurish ado: reading and choosing of plays, attempts to please everyone, to find a suitable rôle for each, a rôle that would fit his or her taste, a rôle that would not be smaller than that of anyone else. It was necessary to arrange a programme of several one-act plays. Only this made it possible to give each a part to his or her liking.

And what about a rôle for myself?

What was my ideal at that time?

It was a primitive one. I yearned to emulate my favourite actor Nikolai Muzil, a comedian of the simpleton type. It was his manners and voice that I loved most in him. All my efforts boiled down to trying to imitate his movements and develop a hoarse voice. I wanted to be his exact double. And I naturally chose a play in which he had appeared, knowing that this would give me the chance to play exactly as he did. It was a one-act vaudeville called *A Cup of Tea.* I knew everything about it: his every intonation, gesture, and his full scale of mimetics. There was nothing the director could add, for my part had already been directed by another and all I had to do was to repeat what I had seen–that is, to copy blindly. I felt good, free and confident on the stage.

It was altogether different with the part of an old man in the one-act vaudeville skit *The Old Mathematician, or the Appearance of a Comet in a Provincial Town.*[12] In this rôle I had no examples to follow, and therefore it seemed empty, meaningless, devoid of life. What I needed was a ready-made stage portrait. I was forced to ask myself:

"How would that actor, whose acting methods I know and can copy, play this part?"

There were some sequences that called for an imitation I could do, and I felt satisfied. In others there was nothing I could imitate and I felt bad. Then I would hit upon the methods of some other actor I knew, and I would find myself at home on the stage. In yet another place I would recognize still another actor, in a fourth one more, and so on through the whole part. And so, in one part, I gave ten distinct performances; in one man I saw ten distinct individuals. Each separate sequence thus copied was passable in itself, but taken together they were impossible. The part resembled a blanket sewn together of rags, shreds and remnants. I felt bad on the stage. There was nothing here in common with the impression I had received in my rôle in *A Cup of Tea.* That part had given me tremendous satisfaction; the one in *The Old Mathematician* brought me untold torture. And worst of all, I did not know the reason for it.

"God, how easy and pleasant it is to occupy oneself with art!" I used to say rehearsing *A Cup of Tea.*

"How hard, how torturing art is!" I said sorrowfully after *The Old Mathematician.*

It is easy to play, and yet it is hard; it is a ravishing art and at the same time unbearable. So it seemed to me, and I was not mistaken. There is no joy greater than to feel oneself at home on the stage and no greater torture than to be a guest on it. There is nothing harder than portraying something that is hazy, strange, incomprehensible. These contradictions are a source of joy and grief to me to this day.

My first presentation was on September 5, 1877, on my mother's patron saint's day. That which had been always so far off and impossible was actually taking place. In a few hours I would stand on the stage, alone, before an audience. Many people would come from Moscow and from remote suburbs to see me, and I would be able to do with them as I willed. If I willed it they would sit quietly, listen and look at me; if I willed it, they would laugh. I wanted to appear before the public as quickly as possible and experience the feeling which at that time I called the feeling of "publicness."

I was excited as I had never been excited before. My nerves were on edge and very often I nearly moved away from sheer happiness. Every time I thought of the forthcoming performance my heart fluttered so madly I could not utter a word. At one such moment I nearly fell out of the carriage while my brother and I were returning from the gymnasium. On my knees I had a huge pasteboard box, embracing it as if it were a buxom woman. In the box were wigs and make-up. The specific odour of the make-up oozed through the cracks in the box and intoxicated me.

I was so intoxicated that, forgetting myself, almost dropped out of the carriage.

When we reached home and saw the covered tables, the hustle and bustle, the sound of dishes, the caterers and hired waiters, my heart began to pound, I felt faint and had to sit down for fear of swooning.

We were hurriedly given something to eat and sat down to a table covered with a multitude of dishes. How I love these dinners in the midst of preparation for a feast! They excite one like a prelude to something great and important.

In the theatrical wing there was even greater hustle and bustle. My sisters and their friends were placing the costumes in the proper dressing-rooms. The make-up men were preparing beards, paint, and wigs, combing and curling them. A lad whom everybody called Yasha* was rushing from one dressing-room to another. I met him that day never to part from him. Yakov Ivanovich Gremislavsky[13] was fated to play a great role in the art of make-up in the Russian theatre, and to raise it to a height which amazed Europe and America.

The actors, my father, brothers, tutor, and the others, sat down before the mirror of Yakov the make-up man and left it changed into other people. Some became older, some younger and more handsome; others became bald, still others were altogether unrecognizable.

"Is that *you*? Ha-ha-ha!–No one will know you! Marvellous! See how he looks! I can't believe it! Bravo!"

Exclamations so common at amateur performances were heard from all the corners of the dressing-room where people pushed each other, where one was looking for a lost necktie, another for a collar button, a third for a waistcoat. Curious onlookers were in our way, filling the room with cigarette smoke and making a great deal of noise, and it was impossible to drive them out of the small dressing-room.

From the distance there came the strains of a military march. The guests, with lighted lanterns in their hands, were coming down the alleys before triumphantly entering the theatrical wing. The sounds of music came nearer and nearer, and at last thundered so that we could not hear one another, but little by little they began to recede, and then died out somewhere in the garden. After that we heard the tramping of feet, the unceasing sound of voices and the noise of moving chairs. Talk quieted down backstage and in the dressing-rooms; the actors grew quieter also, forced smiles appeared on their faces, confusion. But in my heart there was joy; something boiled up in me and urged me forward to conquer the world. At last the curtain rose, the performance was on.

I finally came out on the stage, and I felt good. Something inside was urging me on, warming me up, stimulating me, and I rushed, so to speak, through the play. I was not creating a rôle or a play–for I did not care about this meaningless vaudeville; I was creating an art all my own, my own artistic action. I was presenting my genius to the audience, I thought myself a great actor put on the stage to be admired by all. I was excited by the fast tempo and rhythm of my acting; it was leaving me breathless. I uttered my lines and made my gestures with incredible speed. I felt puffed out, my breath came in short gasps and that made speaking difficult, but I misinterpreted this nervosity and unrestraint as genuine inspiration. I was sure that I was holding the audience spellbound.

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* Short for Yakov.–*Tr.*

The play was over and I expected people to approve of my acting, to praise me for it. But no one said anything, everyone seemed to be avoiding me. I approached the director and humiliated myself by fishing for a compliment.

"Not bad," he answered. "Rather nice."

What did he mean by "rather nice"?

It was then that artistic doubt was born in my heart.

After the second play, *The Old Mathematician,* in which I did not altogether feel at home, the director came up to me and said happily with the obvious intention of encouraging me:

"That was much better!"

How come, I wondered. When I felt good on the stage no one lauded me; when I felt bad, they did. What's the matter? So there were contradictions between how one felt on the stage and how one felt in the auditorium?!

And I learned another thing that same evening: that it was not easy to see one's mistakes on the stage. It was a science that required understanding how the people on the other side of the footlights took to your acting. I had to resort to all sorts of stratagems to get my audience to tell me what was wrong and only then did I understand, firstly, that I spoke so softly—despite all the inspiration—that they often wanted to urge me to speak my lines louder, and, secondly, that I spoke so fast that they wanted to ask me to speak more slowly. My gestures were so rapid and my legs took me from one end of the stage to another so fast that the audience did not know what was happening. That same evening I learned the meaning of actors' vanity, which engenders malice, gossip and envy.

Instead of joy my début brought me perplexity. Soon afterwards, in another private performance, I did my best to speak loudly and not to gesticulate so much.

And what was the result? I was reproached for shouting, for grimacing instead of mimicking, for exaggeration and lack of a *feeling of true measure.*

Apparently, the nervousness in my hands had migrated to my face, hence my exaggerated grimaces. As for the *feeling of true measure,* that was something I had no real understanding of....

Our productions were few and far between and in the interim we suffered from lack of artistic work. In order to assuage our artistic thirst we would resort to pranks. One evening my friend and I made ourselves up as drunken beggars and went to the station. There we frightened both friends and strangers, and more than once the watchmen chased us from the platform. The worse we were treated, the more we were satisfied. For in life one must be more subtle and realistic than on the stage, where illusion is almost ready-made for you. If we were not good actors we would get into trouble. But since we were chased away, we must have played our parts well. That is when I appreciated the "feeling of true measure."

Our greatest success came when we assumed the rôles of gypsies. A gypsy band was camping half-way between our estate and the station. Gypsy women and children could be seen on every road near the summer residences. One evening we expected a cousin, who was in love with a neighbour of ours and who pounced upon every fortune-teller. Shortly before her arrival we had engaged a new governess, an expert fortune-teller. The new governess, the son of one of the maids and I disguised ourselves as gypsies and went to meet my cousin. On the way to the station, I told the governess what to say to my cousin. When we met her carriage, we started running after it, shouting something in a broken gypsy jargon. The young woman was frightened, and ordered the coachman to get her home as quickly as possible. Having reached the house, and told one of my brothers the secret, we waited near the gates. Soon the excited young woman came out followed by the rest of the family, and putting her hand through a break in the fence, asked the gypsy to tell her fortune. The effect was indescribable. And again I was proud that the *feeling of true measure* had won the day.

To illustrate how an amateur dramatic club works without a specialist for a guide I shall describe a few of the plays which were characteristic of my activity then. I will not do it in a chronological order, for it is not that that interests me. The important thing is to show all the phases the actor goes through and all his ups and downs.

ACTORS IN REAL LIFE

THERE WAS A TIME when we could not arrange any performances, for we could not get people to play in them. And so we, that is, my two sisters, my friend and I, decided to rehearse, just to keep in trim, two French vaudeville skits *The Weak String* and *A Woman's Secret.*

Having seen all sorts of European wonders, we became more exacting in our tastes and artistic demands. But we lacked the necessary means for presenting plays as real directors and actors did. In fact, what could we do when we had no real artistic technique, no real knowledge and no necessary materials for scenery and costumes? We had nothing apart from the old dresses of our parents, sisters and friends, some unnecessary knick-knacks, ribbons, buttons and other little things. Willy-nilly, we had to substitute originality, tricks and hokum for luxury. We also needed a director, and since there was none and we wanted to act, I had to become one. Life itself was forcing us to learn . . . through practice.

We faced such a problem in the case of these two French vaudeville skits. How were we to turn them into a piquant French show?

The plots were simple indeed. In the first skit, two students love two grisettes, and seek for their weak strings to win their love. But what is the weak string in a woman? A male canary, they note, beats a female, and the latter, after a good beating, kisses the former. Perhaps that is the weak string? One must beat the woman. The students try it and get slapped. But in the end the grisettes fall in love with them, and they marry. Clear, pure, and naïve, isn't it?

And here is the plot of the other. Megrio the artist and a student (I played Megrio) court a grisette. The artist wants to marry her, and the student helps him. But they discover a terrible secret: the grisette drinks–rum has been found in her room. Perplexity and sorrow! In the end they learn that the grisette uses rum to wash her hair. The rum is consumed by the student and the drunken janitor, and the grisette falls in love with the artist. The latter two kiss in the finale, while the first two roll under a table and sing a hilarious couplet.

An artist, a grisette, an attic, a student, Montmartre–there is style, enchantment, grace, and even romance in that.

Taking advantage of the fact that we lived all that summer in Lyubimovka, we could rehearse as much as we pleased and then play at a moment's notice. We would rise in the morning, bathe, and then rehearse one skit. Then we would breakfast and rehearse the other. After a walk we would repeat the first. In the evening, if there was some guest, we would propose:

"Would you like us to play for you?"

"Go right ahead," he would answer.

We would light a kerosene lamp (the scenery was always set and ready), lower the curtain, and dress–one would get into a blouse, another into an apron, put on a bonnet or a cap–and the performance would begin before our solitary spectator. We regarded such performances as rehearsals at which we set ourselves new problems to improve our performances. Here the phrase that I had heard once, *the feeling of true measure,* was studied from every angle. I finally inculcated the actors with such a *feeling of true measure* that our lonely spectator would fall asleep from boredom.

"It is good, but rather–quiet," he would say, confused.

This gave us a new problem–to speak louder. Another spectator would come and say that we were shouting. That meant that there was still no feeling of true measure and it was necessary to find a middle road, i.e., to speak neither too loudly nor too softly. This problem, seemingly so simple at first sight, we could not solve. The hardest thing on the stage is to speak neither louder nor softer than is necessary, and at the same time remain simple and natural.

"A vaudeville skit must be played in full tempo, in full tone," said still another spectator.

"In full tempo? Good! The act lasts forty minutes," I said to my company. "When it takes only thirty minutes it will mean that we are playing in full tempo."

We finally achieved that.

"When it takes us twenty minutes, we will be doing well," said I.

We made a sport of it, and we did it in twenty minutes. It seemed to us that the skit was being played not too loudly and not too softly, and in the proper tempo at last, in full tone, and with true measure. But when our critic came again he refused to recognize our success.

"I don't understand a single word you are saying, or anything that you are doing. This is a mad-house."

"This means that we must do the same thing," I decided undaunted. "But it must be done so that every word, every gesture is completely understood."

If we had been successful in solving this hardest of all problems, we might have become great actors. But we had not. Nevertheless we did achieve some results, if only of an outer technical character. We began to speak more clearly and to act more definitely. This in itself was a result not to be sneered at. Yet it was clearness merely for the sake of clearness, definiteness for the sake of definiteness. And in such conditions there could be no genuine feeling of realism.

Once again we were confused and bewildered, all the more so since we did not even appreciate the outer technical craftsmanship we had gained while experimenting.

At another time, wishing again to give a performance with the participation of only those who had lived together all through the summer, we set out on a search for a suitable play and eventually decided to compose an operetta all our own. Our new work was based on a naïve principle: each of the actors was to invent a rôle to suit himself and explain what he wanted to play. Putting all that together, we started inventing a plot to include all the parts desired, and writing the libretto. The job of composing the music was undertaken by one of our friends.[14] We, the newly-baked writers and the composer, experienced all the tortures of creation. We found out what it meant to create a musico-dramatic work for the stage and why it was difficult. There is no doubt that some parts were successful. They were suitable for the stage, gay, and afforded good opportunities for the stage director and the actor. But when we tried to unite the separate parts and tie them together into a plot, we found that the plot was threadbare, that it would not hold. There was no single basic idea that could lead the author to a definite goal. Just the opposite; there were many altogether different ideas, a few from each of the actors, which tore the plot into many separate pieces. In themselves, the parts were all right, but we could not stick the play together. We did not really understand the reason for our literary failure, but the very fact that we had personal experience in writing plays and music was very useful.

It was necessary to decide whom I wanted to play. Of course I must be handsome and sing tender love arias, in order to be successful with the ladies and resemble some famous singer whom I could copy in voice and stage manner.[15] I was at that stage of artistic development when one does not know what one can and what one cannot achieve on the stage. Everybody, of course, knows the weakness of actors: an ugly man wants to be handsome on the stage, an awkward lout agile, a short man tall. A man devoid of lyricism wants to act a sweet lover, a simpleton to play Don Juan, a man alien to tragedy wants to be Hamlet, a comedian dreams of the rôle of King Lear. Ask an amateur what part he wants to play most. You will be amazed by his choice. People are always attracted by what they have not, and actors often use the stage to get there what they cannot get in real life. But this is a dangerous path. The misunderstanding of one's true ability and calling in art is the strongest obstacle in the further development of an actor. It is a blind alley in which he spends dozens of years until he realizes his mistake.

But even this performance proved to be interesting because of one very illustrative incident. My cousin, who was to play the leading part, was taken ill. There was no one to take her place and I had to give the part to my eldest sister. Thereto she had been a sort of Cinderella, doing the rough work around the stage, like preparing costumes, changing scenery, and calling the actors when it was their turn to go on the stage. She played only on rare occasions, and then only in small parts. And suddenly, the leading part was hers.

Not believing in the successful result of this change, I rehearsed her only because I had to, and often could not hide my impatience with her, although she was not guilty of anything and did not deserve the treatment she got. I tortured her, and at one of the rehearsals she lost patience. With tears of despair in her eyes, my sister played the most important scene so well she held us spellbound. The ice had cracked and the water was at last free; the bars had dropped and the prisoner was at liberty. The timidity that had chained her was broken by her despair and the strong temperament of an artiste found its way to the surface. A new actress was born!

Our operetta was not successful. That evening we started looking for a play especially for our newly-discovered actress. Our choice fell on *The Practical Man,* by Dyachenko. Here is how we managed the rehearsals. We decided that in order to become better acquainted with a part and to enter into it, it is necessary to become accustomed to it, and that requires constant practice. It was therefore agreed that on a given day we would live as the people whom we were to play, and in the circumstances of the play in question. Whatever might happen on that day in our real life, whether we went out for a walk, or gathered mushrooms or went boating, we were to be guided by the circumstances of the play and act as each of us was supposed to do in his rôle. It was necessary to adapt our real life to that of our characters. For instance, in the play, the parents of my future bride forbade me to see their daughter because I was a poor and ugly student, and she was rich and beautiful. It was necessary to plot in order to meet my sweetheart without her parents knowing it. But here there comes my friend, who is to play her father. It was necessary to part from my sister (the bride) before he saw us, or to explain our meeting and give some valid and logical reason for it. My friend, in his turn, had to act on these occasions not as he would do were he to meet us in real life, but as he would have acted if he were the practical man whose part he was playing.

The difficulty lay in the fact that it was necessary to be not only an actor, but also the author of all sorts of impromptus. Often there were not enough words or subjects for conversation, and then we would abandon our parts for a minute, consult as to what was supposed to happen to the *dramatis personae* under the given circumstances, and decide what thoughts, words, actions and movements were to crop up as a result of the living conditions we encountered on our way. After our consultations we returned to our rôles and continued with our experiment. As we practised and gathered material, we found our work easier.

This time, according to my old habit, I began by imitating the well-known actor M. P. Sadovsky of the imperial theatres, in the rôle of the student Meluzov in Ostrovsky's *Talents and Admirers.* I developed the same awkward, web-footed walk that was his, aped his short-sightedness, his clumsy gestures, worked out the habit of patting the almost growing hairs of my beard, and of fixing my spectacles and bristling hair. As I advanced towards an understanding of real life that surrounded us, this copying, unknown to me, began to pass into a habit, and later into a true experience. In the atmosphere of the stage, among properties and made-up people it was possible to conventionalize, but in the atmosphere of real life it is impossible to lie. Apparently in this production I again learned what the *feeling of true measure* was. The work we then accomplished, although it fell short of expectation, nevertheless planted certain seeds for the future in our souls. This was the first part in which I was praised by those who understood the stage. But the young ladies said, "Isn't it a pity that you are so ugly!" It was pleasanter for me to give ear to the ladies, and not to those who knew the stage, and I again began to dream of playing handsome men.

It was a pity. I had left a blind alley, and the broad highway was already before me. And now I went back to the blind alley to try all possible sorts of rôles except those which nature intended for me. Poor, poor actors that have mistaken their calling on the stage! How important it is to understand one's true calling!

MUSIC

I WAS TWENTY or so when one succesful businessman said to me: "In order to become something it is necessary to occupy yourself with some sort of social work. You must patronize some school or a poor-house, or be a member of the Duma." And from that time my sufferings began.

I went to meetings and tried to look imposing and important. I feigned interest in the question of what kind of blouses or bonnets were made for the old women in the poor-house and thought up methods for the betterment of child education in Russia without knowing a single thing about what I was doing; with great artfulness, like an actor, I learned how to keep wisely silent when I did not understand what was said to me, and to utter "Hm, yes. I shall think about it" with an air of great meaningfulness. I learned to listen to other people's opinions and then cleverly peddle them as my own. Apparently I played the part very well for every charitable institution in the city began to seek my patronage. I never had time to attend to everything, I became tired, and my soul was filled with coldness and revulsion and a feeling that I was on the wrong track. I was not doing my own work, and I could find no satisfaction in what I was doing. I was building a career I did not need. Nevertheless, my new activities took greater and greater hold of me, and I could not refuse to continue fulfilling the tasks I had undertaken. Happily for me, a solution was found. My cousin, a very active man and a director of the Russian Musical Society and Conservatoire, left his post for a higher one. I was elected in his stead, and took up the position to resign from all the others on the pretext that I was too preoccupied.[16] It was better to be in artistic circles among talented people than in poor-houses and schools which were alien to me.

At that time the Conservatoire was filled with really interesting people. It is enough to say that among my colleagues on the board were the composer Pyotr Chaikovsky, the composer and pianist Taneyev, one of the founders of the Tretyakov Gallery Sergei Tretyakov, and among the professors preparing future artistes, men like Vasily Safonov. My directorship in the Russian Musical Society brought me into close contact with such outstanding and talented people as Anton Rubinstein and Erbmannsdörfer who impressed me greatly and played no mean part in my artistic development.

Even a slight acquaintance with great men, the mere proximity to them, the unseen exchange of spiritual currents, their often unconscious reaction to the phenomena about them, their exclamations, their words, their eloquent pauses leave a mark on your soul. Later, when the artiste develops and meets analogous facts in life, he remembers the words, the opinions, the exclamations, and the pauses of the great man, deciphers them and grasps their real meaning. More than once I have remembered the eyes, the exclamations, and the meaningful pauses of Anton Rubinstein whom I had met two or three times.

It so happened that all the directors of the Russian Musical Society were away from Moscow when it was announced that Rubinstein would come from St. Petersburg to conduct a symphony concert. The entire administrative responsibility for the concert was left to me. I was very much confused, for I knew that Rubinstein was very severe, frank to a point of sharpness, and suffered no compromise or leniency in art. Of course, I went to meet him at the station. Unexpectedly, he had come by an earlier train, and I met him and introduced myself at his hotel. Our talk was very short and formal. I asked him whether he had any instructions to give me about the concert.

"What instructions? The whole thing has been arranged," he answered in a high voice, drawing out his words and looking sharply at me. Unlike us ordinary earthly beings, he was not ashamed to look at people as if they were things. I noticed the same habit in some of the other great men I met.

His answer and his gaze disconcerted me. It seemed to me that he was surprised and disappointed.

"Just look what stage affairs have reached!" his gaze seemed to say. "Some directors we have now—mere boys! What does he understand? And here he is, offering his services!"

His lionlike composure, his mane, complete absence of effort, lazy, graceful, regal movements, like those of a beast of prey, oppressed me. Alone with him in the little room, I felt my nonentity and his greatness. I suddenly remembered how fiery this quiet giant could become at the piano or behind the conductor's stand, how his long hair rose like the mane of a lion, what fire gleamed in his eyes, how his arms, his head, his whole body seemed to embrace the whole of the storming orchestra. Lion and Anton Rubinstein became one in my imagination. I seemed to be the guest of a lion in his den.

An hour later I met him at the rehearsal. He tried to outshout the thundering orchestra with his high voice and shrieked abuse at the trombone players. Apparently, he felt that there was not enough sound and strength to interpret the emotions surging within him, and he demanded that the trombone players lift the openings of their instruments higher so that their roar might fly out at the public. The rehearsal ended. Like a lion after a battle, Rubinstein lay on his couch, a feline softness in all of his tired body, streaming with perspiration. With a beating heart I stood near the door of his dressing-room, not knowing whether I was guarding him or admiring him, or just looking into the crack between the door and the jamb. The musicians were also excited, and they accompanied him with awesome respect when, after resting, he went to his cage-like room in the hotel.

Imagine my surprise when several indignant trombone players approached me and arrogantly declared that they would not come for the concert unless Rubinstein apologized to them.

"Why?" I wondered, remembering the beauty of what I had just seen and heard.

They could not explain why they thought themselves insulted. Apparently, they heard or thought that they heard an offensive word from him or they could not bear the tone of the excited genius. I tried to pacify them, but all in vain. At last I persuaded them to appear at the concert. If Rubinstein would promise me to apologize they would play, they vowed. If not, they would not play.

I went to Rubinstein at once, excused myself for coming, stuttered and mumbled about what had happened, and asked him what I was to do. The lion was lying in the same restful pose in which I had seen him at our first meeting. *What I told him did not make the slightest impression on him,* although I was sweating with excitement and fear of the coming scandal, and the helplessness of my responsible position.

"Goo-oo-ood! I will spee-eak to them!" he squeaked. If the intonation he used could be quoted as well as his words, it would have meant, "Good, I will show them how to raise scandals! I will give them something to think about!"

"Then I may inform them that you will apologize?" I asked stubbornly.

"Yes, yes, you may. Tell them to be at their places," he said even more quietly, lazily stretching his hand for a letter which he began opening.

Of course, I should have waited for a more definite answer, but I did not dare waste his time and could not insist on my demand, and so I went away dissatisfied, anxious, and not at all reassured that the concert would take place.

Before it began, I told the musicians that I had seen Rubinstein and had told him of all that had happened, and that he had replied, "Good, I will speak to them!" I did not tell them, naturally, how he said it and what he really meant. The musicians were satisfied, their anger seemed almost dead.

The concert was tremendously successful. But how cool the great man was, and how disdainful and indifferent to the public that applauded him. He would go out and bow mechanically and, as it seemed to me, would at once forget those who applauded him; and under their very sight he conversed with an acquaintance, as if the applause were not intended for him. When the impatience of the public and of the musicians, who were beating their music stands from excitement, reached a point where it seemed that they would create a scandal if he did not come out again, I was sent to remind the great man that the evening was not yet over and that he was expected to appear again. I fulfilled my duty timidly and received a completely serene answer:

"I hear them myself."

In other words, "Mind your own business. I know how to handle them myself."

I was thrilled and envied the right of genius to such majestic indifference to glory, and the consciousness of his superiority to the crowd.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the mutinous trombone players: they were outshouting all the others present.

I met Anton Rubinstein again, and although I played a very foolish part at that unforgettable meeting, I will tell of it, for the typical traits of the genius showed in it again.

This also happened while I was a director of the Russian Musical Society. The 200th performance of the opera *The Demon* was being presented at the Bolshoi. The theatre was packed with Moscow's *élite*. The gala lights, the distinguished guests in the imperial boxes, the appearance of the best singers even in small parts, the wonderful welcome to the great favourite himself, the singing of "Glory" by the whole chorus and the soloists, and then the overture and the curtain went up. The first act was over. There was tremendous applause. Curtain calls. The second act began. The composer conducted, but he was nervous. His lionlike gaze burned now one soloist or musician now another. His movements were impatient, vexatious. There were whispers that "Rubinstein is in bad spirits! He is dissatisfied!"

At the very moment when the Demon appeared from a trapdoor and rose above Tamara, who was lying on a couch, Rubinstein stopped the orchestra and the performance. Tapping nervously on his stand, he impatiently addressed someone on the stage:

"I told you a hundred ti-i-imes, that..."

The rest was lost on me.

I learned later that the whole trouble was caused by a reflector that should have illuminated the Demon from the back and not from the front.

There was a tomb-like silence. People ran across the stage and in the wings one could see heads moving, hands waving.... The poor artistes, deprived of the music and of customary action on the stage, looked lost, as if they were suddenly undressed and were trying to cover their nakedness. It looked as if a whole hour had passed. The crowd, stunned, gradually came to its senses, began to voice indignation and criticism. The auditorium buzzed with excitement. Rubinstein sat quietly, almost in the same pose as the one in which I had seen him at our first meeting. When the noise reached its highest, he turned slowly, lazily and severely towards the auditorium and tapped his stand with the baton. But this by no means signified that he had surrendered and wanted to continue with the performance. It was an order to the crowd that they keep quiet. A silence ensued. Quite some time passed, until a strong light struck the back of the Demon, making him look almost like a transparent silhouette. The performance was renewed.

"How beautiful!" came from the auditorium.

The ovation as the curtain fell was rather smaller than before. Perhaps the public was hurt. But this did not seem to bother Rubinstein. I saw him in the wings talking nonchalantly to someone.

The next act was opened by us, that is, by one of my colleagues and myself. We were to present the composer with a huge wreath with long ribbons. As soon as Rubinstein had approached his stand, we were pushed through the opening between the red portal and the curtain. We did look funny crawling through that crack. Unused to the bright footlights of the great stage, we were at once blinded. We could see nothing in front of us but a mist rising from the footlights and concealing everything on the other side. We walked, walked and walked.... It seemed we had walked a whole mile. There was talk in the auditorium, growing little by little into a rumble. Three thousand people were roaring with laughter, while we continued walking, unaware of anything, until we had reached the theatre director's box off the stage. We had literally lost ourselves. We had passed the prompter's box, in front of which, with his back to the orchestra, stood the composer. Shading our eyes with our hands from the footlights, and looking over them into the auditorium, forgetting the huge wreath with its ribbons dragging on the stage behind us, we were a comic pair indeed. Rubinstein was rolling with laughter. He was desperately beating his stand with the baton to attract our attention. We finally found him, presented him with the wreath, and almost ran off the stage in confusion.

There were other meetings with famous musicians. When Nikolai Rubinstein[17] died there was a long search for his successor to conduct symphony concerts in Moscow.

At last, after many men had been tried, the choice fell on that famous conductor and fine musician Max Erbmannsdörfer, who, rumour said, was a "favourite at the court." He was at the zenith of his career at the time when I was a director of the Russian Musical Society.

The wife of the cousin whose place I had now taken in the Conservatoire was very friendly with Erbmannsdörfer's wife. I was young then; I occupied a position of sorts; I was rich. In a word, I had everything required of an eligible bachelor. Some women cannot bear to see a bachelor who is a "good match." They cannot sleep in peace unless they marry off the happy, free bachelor who wants to live for himself, to see the world, and not to stay at his home hearth, tied by bonds of matrimony. In a word, they wanted to see me married, and for their object they chose a rising young German violinist, Fraulein Z., who was appearing as a guest soloist with the symphony orchestra. Young, blonde, sentimental and talented, she was chaperoned by a strict mother who valued the good points of her daughter. My sister-in-law was a willing matchmaker and she began to give dinners and suppers with the purpose of bringing the young woman and me together. She praised me to the girl's mother, telling her that although I was so young I was already a director of the Musical Society. At the same time she said to me, "How charming she is! How can you be so blind and cold at your age? Get up and hand her a chair. Take her arm and lead her in to dinner."

I would take her in to dinner, sit at her side all through the meal, but I could not guess what my sister-in-law was aiming at. I think they even enlisted the help of Chaikovsky, whose brother was married to a sister of my sister-in-law. I was invited to intimate musical *soirées* and suppers arranged by composers and musicians at the Hotel Billot, where most visiting musicians stopped, Fraulein Z. included. The best musicians and composers came to these *soirées,* played their new compositions, and the young violinist would acquaint them with those numbers of her repertoire which she did not play at public concerts. Chaikovsky liked the young woman, and he would seat me next to her, although, due to his timidity, he was never able to *"faire* *les bonneurs de la maison.*"* Chaikovsky's kindness would confuse me. I could not understand its reason. He loved to repeat to me that in his opinion I could play the part of Peter the Great in youth, and that when I became a great singer, he would write an opera on that theme for me.

At these musicales Erbmannsdörfer and his wife showed me particular attention and I heard that they liked me very much and were happy that I had become a director of the Musical Society.

At the end of the musicales, Fraulein Z.'s mother would invite me and some of the musicians for a cup of tea in their suite. Chaikovsky would come in, for a minute, as was his wont, his soft fur hat under his arm (he always carried it there), and would leave as suddenly as he had come. He was a restless man. Erbmannsdörfer, his wife and my sister-in-law would remain longer than the others. But they also disappeared mysteriously, and Fraulein Z., her mother and I would remain alone. But I was far from eloquent in my German, and for this reason, if for no other, the young diva began to give me violin lessons. Her Stradivarius would come out of its precious case, I would take it awkwardly and tenderly into one hand, while my other hand held the bow even more awkwardly, and the silence of the orderly German hotel already plunged into sleep would be pierced by the terrible shriek of a tortured violin string. But the diva soon left. I presented her with roses, and she sadly tore off the petals and threw them in my direction one by one as the train pulled out from the station. That was the end of our romance.

My matchmaker gave me quite a scolding for my dumbness.

I became close friends with Erbmannsdörfer's family. He was a very talented, nervous and temperamental man, whom one had to know how to approach. Apparently I guessed the secret, although I cannot say the same of the other directors: they never got used to him. This had strange consequences. When it was necessary to ask the great artiste for something, it was not done by his colleagues, artistes as big as he himself, but by me. In most cases I did not approach him directly, but through his clever and attractive wife, who knew how to handle him. Little by little he got used to dealing with me, and did not want to talk to anyone else. It may sound funny–I don't know how it happened myself, but at one time I helped him to arrange the programme for a whole year, though I knew absolutely nothing about music. Perhaps he tolerated me because he wanted some living person in the room with whom he could talk. Or perhaps he needed me to write down his notes. The directors, naturally, made use of me to put through the programmes they wanted. I was compelled to give advice to a famous musician. Happily, as I have already described, I had one good quality, and one very important in life. I could be quiet when that was necessary and make a serious face and utter a much-meaning "So!" Or to mutter thoughtfully, *"Also, Sie meinen"** or to hiss through closed teeth, *"So, jetzt verstehe ich."*** Or to shake my head negatively over some proposed number in his programme. *"Nein?"* he would wonder. *"Nein,"* I would answer confidently. *"Dann was denn?"**** *"Ein* Mozart, *dann ein* Bach,"**** I would say, calling in order all the numbers that had been suggested to me beforehand. Evidently my prompters were not fools, for my talented friend was always amazed by my good taste.

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* Play the host. (Fr.)

If he did not give in at once, I would complicate the affair. "What is this?" and I would hum a melody that appeared to me suitable for the programme. *"Aber spielen Sie,"****** the great conductor would say. But I would just sing whatever came into my head. Of course, he never understood me, and would sit down to play the tune himself. "No, no, not that!" and I would again sing something impossible, and again he would run to the piano and play something, but I would not be satisfied. In this way I took his mind off the track, and he would forget what he wanted or grow cold to it, and then I would leap up as if I had struck on a brilliant thought, pace the room excitedly, and dictate the new, prompted programme, which apparently also amazed him by the taste and understanding it evinced on my part.

In this manner I was able to do a great deal of what my comrades in the Musical Society asked me. In this new rôle there was a great opportunity for an actor. It was necessary to play very subtly so as not to be caught. I confess that my success gave me quite a bit of artistic satisfaction. If it were impossible to play on the stage, I could at least act in life.

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* And so, you think. (Ger.)

** Yes, I understand now. (Ger.)

*** Then what? (Ger.)

**** Something from Mozart and Bach. (Ger.)

***** Then play it. (Ger.)

DRAMATIC SCHOOL

THE MORE I PLAYED, the more resolutely I searched for the correct methods, the greater was my perplexity. I had no competent hand to guide me. Nothing remained for me but to visit the Maly Theatre and learn from good models. It goes without saying that when famous foreign actors came to perform in Moscow, I attended every play of theirs.

Rossi was no exception. I do not remember the exact date of his arrival. (I might remark here that there is no strict chronological order in this book.) However, I do recall that the great Italian tragedian and his second-rate troupe played throughout Lent in the Bolshoi Theatre. In those days performances in Russian were forbidden during Lent, but performances in foreign languages were allowed. This explains Rossi's presentations in the Bolshoi Theatre.

Naturally, I subscribed to all the performances. Rossi astounded me by his unusual plasticity and rhythm. He was not an actor of elemental temperament like Salvini or Mochalov. Rossi was always polished in his work; he was a genius as a craftsman. Craftsmanship demands a talent of its own and often rises to genius. Rossi was such a genius.

This does not mean that Rossi lacked temperament, expressiveness and inner ability to move the audience. On the contrary. He had all these qualities, and more than once in the theatre we rejoiced and wept together with him. But they were not tears that pour from the springs of the soul as the result of an overwhelming organic shock. Rossi was irresistible, but he owed it more to the logic of his emotions, to the continuity of his plan of the part he was playing, to the confidence of his interpretation, sureness of his craftsmanship and his effects. When Rossi played, you were certain he would convince you by his acting, for his art was truthful. And truth is more convincing than anything else. In his speech and movements he was exceptionally simple. I first saw him as King Lear, and I must confess that his appearance did not impress me favourably. The picturesque side of his rôles was almost always very weak. He paid almost no attention to it–a banal operatic costume, a badly pasted beard, an uninteresting make-up.

The first act seemingly promised nothing extraordinary. The spectator simply grew used to listening to a foreign actor playing a part in an incomprehensible language. But the more the great master unfolded the plan of his rôle and drew its spiritual and physical contours, the more it grew, broadened and deepened before our eyes. Unnoticeably, quietly, consequentially, step by step, Rossi led us up the spiritual ladder to the very climax, but there he did not give us the last elemental burst of a mighty temperament which works miracles in the hearts and souls of men, but, as if he were being merciful to himself as an actor, often switched to simple pathos or used some petty stage trick, knowing that we would not notice it, that we would finish ourselves what he began and that the impetus would carry us to the heights alone, and without him. This method is used by most of the great actors, but not all of them use it in the same way. In lyrical passages, in love scenes, in poetic descriptions, Rossi was inimitable. He had the right to talk simply, and knew how to do it. This is very rare among actors. He possessed a fine voice, handled it with wonderful ability, had an unusually clear diction, correct intonation, a plasticity so perfect that it became second nature with him. And his own nature was created mostly for lyric emotions and experiences.

And all this despite the fact that physically he had nothing to boast of. He was short, his moustaches were dyed, his hands were stumpy, his face wrinkled; but he had remarkable eyes–eyes that were true mirrors of the soul. And with these qualities, already an old man, Rossi portrayed Romeo. He could not play the part any longer, but he drew its inner image to perfection. It was a courageous drawing, almost an impudent one. For instance, in the scene with the monk, Rossi rolled on the floor with despair. And this was done by an old man with a round paunch. But it was not funny, because it was required by the inner image of the rôle, by the correct and interesting psychological line. We understood the wonderful idea, we admired Rossi, we sympathized with Romeo.

These genuine merits of Rossi's talent and art I came to understand later, when I myself became an actor. Before that I admired the great actor unconsciously and tried to copy him. This was both useful and harmful. Harmful because the copying of outward traits hampers individual creative development, and useful because imitating a great model gives one a good taste.

Fired by our stage activity, Father built us a fine theatre in our Moscow home. It was a large room connected by an arch with another one in which we were able to place the platform of a stage or take it away to form a smoking-room. On ordinary days it was a dining-room. On days of the performance it was our theatre. To turn it into a theatre it was enough to light the gas footlights and lift the fine red curtain concealing the stage. Behind it we had all the necessary facilities. All we had to do was to open the theatre.

At that time I brought from Vienna a new operetta called *Javotta.* It had two good points: it had never been played in Moscow and it had more or less suitable rôles for all our actors. The only rôle none of us could play was that of the duke–a part that demanded a trained singer and was much too hard for any of us. We were compelled to invite a professional who was just finishing the Conservatoire and had a well-trained and beautiful baritone voice, but a poor appearance, for he was small, ugly, had all the banal manners of a bad opera actor and did not possess an iota of dramatic talent. One could not say anything to the baritone, he was too sure of his superiority to us. So much the worse for him, I decided, giving free rein to my badly insulted actor's pride. His partner was a relative of ours, who was always preparing to go on the opera stage and never found courage to make her début. From the very first rehearsal there formed two groups: one consisting of us poor amateurs, and the other of the two experienced singers. Rivalry gave us amateurs redoubled energy in our work. One great difficulty was that the experienced baritone quickly learned his part and did not want to rehearse it with our inexperienced chorus. I was forced to understudy him in order to help the chorus in its rehearsals.

When everything was ready, the baritone appeared and condescendingly approved the work done by the amateurs. We had rehearsed according to a system worked out by ourselves–first, we memorized the text so that the words repeated themselves mechanically, as we had done in *The Weak String* and in *A Women's Secret* and, second, we lived our parts in real life as we did when we were getting ready for *The Practical Man.* Of course this did not lead us anywhere, for the methods of experience in life continually called for impromptu work, and the method of memorizing words completely excluded the possibility of impromptus. Like every coarse and mechanical method, the memorizing of words won out. No sooner did my partner finish saying his lines and I had heard the well-known final words than my tongue would take up my own words with feelings lagging behind. We confused this mechanical confidence with swift tempo, on the one hand, and with firm intonation, on the other.

Stanislavsky as Megrio in the vaudeville *A Woman's Secret* (1881)

Nevertheless rehearsals enabled us to achieve certain harmony. We became used one to the other, and mechanical memorizing gave the illusion of well-rehearsed perfection. The plan of the production and the distribution of parts was worked out quite well: our good taste was greatly influenced by the good examples set us by the great foreign artistes who came to Moscow. Without any doubt there was a great deal in our favour when we compared ourselves to the two experienced singers. But the baritone would take one high note—and he knew well how to take it—and our audience would forget us and give an ovation for the man in whom they saw an expert.

"But he is a blockhead!" we cried with ill-concealed envy.

"Of course," some would answer us, "but then he has a voice. What force! What an ability to sing!"

"What's the use of working?" we would say, exchanging glances with one another.

The experienced baritone was the hero of the performance. We only helped him along. Anger and indignation at this injustice forced us to think deeply. We needed more than talent; we needed ability. What were we to do? How were we to work? We were willing to learn. We only waited for someone to tell us where and how. Go to school? But there was none. There were only amateur circles and they discussed art without plan or system. Take private lessons? But the majority of the so-called professors of dramatic art were charlatans who spoiled their pupils; and prominent actors were not interested in amateurs. These actors were in possession of some fundamentals which they either worked out themselves or received as a heritage from the great actors of the past generations, but they were unwilling to betray their secrets. How an actor works and creates is a mystery which he carries into the grave with him. Some do it simply because they don't know their own selves, because they create intuitively and have no conscious relation to their creations. Others know very well *what, why,* and *how* things are done. But it is their patented secret, which it does not pay to pass on to someone else. They might teach correctly, but they would never open the eyes of their pupils.

Luckily for me a new dramatic school was opened at the time I am describing. It was headed by a talented actress, a pupil of Shchepkin, bred by the old dramatic school of the imperial theatres. I had heard much about the old methods of training an actor; many of these stories are imprinted in my memory.

In the old days, actors were taught simply and—who knows?—perhaps more correctly than today.

"Do you want to get into the theatre, to become an actor? Go to the ballet school. First of all it is necessary to teach you how to govern your body. And extras are always needed, if not for dancing, then for mass scenes, as court pages. If we make a dancer of you, good. And if we see that you have no knack for dancing, but that you have some for the opera or the drama, we'll send you for lessons to a singer or an actor. If you are not successful, return, play pages, become a stage hand or an office clerk."

With this order of things only those who had talent reached the stage. That was as it should be. Without talent or ability one must not go on the stage. In our organized schools of dramatic art it is not so today. What they need is a certain quantity of paying pupils. And not everyone who can pay has talent or can hope to become an actor. In practice, it is quite the other way: talented people do not pay even if they are materially able to do so. Why should they? They will not be chased away. Those who pay are the less talented, or the talentless. They support the school materially, they pay the salaries of the professors, they pay for the heat and the light and the rent. In order to graduate one man of talent the school must deceive at least a hundred who are not gifted. Without such a compromise no art school can exist at the present time.

How did they teach dramatic art in the past? They taught only those who were chosen from among the pupils of the theatre's ballet school.

They were sent for their education to the best artistes. The pride of our national art, the man who recreated in himself all that the West could give and created the foundations of true Russian dramatic art, our great lawgiver and actor, Mikhail Semyonovich Shchepkin, took his pupils into his family. They lived with him, they boarded with him, they grew up and married under his guidance. But let us hear one of his pupils, the famous actress of the Maly Theatre, Fedotova.

"Here is how our never-to-be-forgotten Mikhail Shchepkin taught me," she recalled. "I lived in his house during the summer school holidays. Often I would play croquet with the other children when suddenly we would hear a booming voice reverberating through the whole garden. 'Looshenka-a-a!' That meant that the old man had awakened. He was out in the garden in his bathrobe and with a little pipe in his mouth, calling me to take my lesson. Well, I would be angry, and weep, and throw down my croquet hammer from vexation, but I would go, because it was impossible to disobey Mikhail Shchepkin. Why it was impossible I don't know myself, but it was impossible, impossible, impossible, my friend. So I would go, with a pouting face, sit down with a book, and turn my face away from it.

" 'Come, come, cheer up, and read me that page,' the old man would say. 'If you read it well, I will let you go at once, but if you don't, don't be angry with me if I keep you at it till evening or till you do.'

" 'But I can't, dear teacher! Let me do it later. I will read ten pages then if you will.'

" 'Come, come now, we've heard enough talking. You had better read now and stop wasting your time and mine.'

"Well, I would begin to read, and nothing, absolutely nothing, would come of it.

" 'Did you come here to learn the alphabet, or to read in syllables? Read it as it should be read. You know very well how to read it.'

"I would struggle and struggle, and concentrate all my attention, but I could not drive the thought of the croquet game from my mind. And when at last I did drive it away and thought as hard as I could of the part and what was in it, something would really come of it.

" 'Well, you can go now, my clever one.' And I would run away as fast as I could. We would begin playing again, there was noise, laughter, and then suddenly, the voice of the old man: 'Looshenka-a-a!' And I would begin all over again. This is how the old man trained me and developed my will power. An actor must have a strong will power. The first thing an actor should do is to learn to control his will."

And here is another story she told me.

"At last I made my dèbut, I went through my baptism of fire. There was noise, applause, curtain calls. I stood like a fool and did not know what to do. Then I curtseyed, and ran into the wings, again on the stage, again a curtsey, again into the wings. And I was so tired, my friend, so tired. But there was a joyous warmth in my soul. Could it be that it was I who did all of that? And in the wings stood Mikhail Shchepkin himself, leaning on his stick and smiling. And his smile was so kind, so very kind. You can never know what it meant to us to see him smiling. Only we and God will ever know. I would run into the wings, and he would wipe my face with his handkerchief, kiss me and pat my cheek. 'Well, my clever one,' he would say, 'it was not in vain that I tortured you and you tortured me so long. Go, go and take your bow while they are applauding you. Take what you have earned.' And I would go out on the stage again, and curtsey to all sides of me, and run back into the wings. At last they were silent.

" 'Well, and now come here, clever one,' Mikhail Semyonovich called me. 'Why did they applaud you, clever one? Do you know? Well, I am going to tell you. Because your face is young and pretty. But if I, with my old mug, played as you played today? What would they have done to me?'

" 'What would they have done to you?'

" 'Why, they would have driven me from the stage at the wrong end of a stick. Remember that. Well, and now you can go and listen to their compliments. We'll talk later about this, you and I. We have our score to settle yet.' "

After her first success, when she was already an actress of the Maly Theatre, Fedotova, and others like her, still continued to dance in the ballet.

Another famous artiste of the same period, Samarin, passed through almost the same experience. His début was successful, and he was accepted by the Maly Theatre as a leading juvenile and played many parts in the repertoire, but at the same time continued to represent a lion pierced with an arrow in the ballet *Tsar Candale*. The famous artiste could die so well that no one could be found to replace him. So he continued to appear in the ballet.

"Let him dance, let him play a bit. Why should they idle their time away? They're young, they need work, or they will get spoiled," said the old teachers and the administration of the theatre.

But there were still other methods of teaching in the same theatre. Here is how one of the most brilliant actors of the Russian stage treated a young but conceited actor who had just graduated from the dramatic school. They played together in a vaudeville skit, whose entire point lay in having the young man drop a letter, which was the corner-stone of the whole plot. The young actor did not drop the letter accidentally, but deliberately.

"I don't believe you! Once more! I don't believe you! That's not how love letters are dropped; I'll wager you know just how they are lost, you rascal! Now it is better. Once more! I don't believe you again!"

He tried to make the young man do what he wished him to do for hours, for the whole play depended on it. And the management of the theatre patiently waited until the young man learned to drop his letter properly.

The vaudeville skit was successful, and the juvenile became even more conceited than before.

"I'll have to give him a lesson," said the older artiste. "Stepan, my dear, give me my coat," he addressed him in the presence of others, in a kind voice. "And my galoshes over there. Get them. Don't be lazy, get them for the old man; bend down and put them on for me. That's it. Now you may go."

The first thing taught in the school was a full programme of general education Talks were conducted by famous professors. As far as special studies were concerned, and that of dramatic art in particular, they were taught in the following manner.

Let us say that the pupil could not pronounce the sounds S, ZH, and SHCH. The teacher would sit down in front of him, open the mouth as wide as possible, and say to the pupil:

"Look in my mouth. You see what my tongue is doing; it touches the roots of my upper teeth. Do the same. Say it. Repeat it ten times. Open your mouth wider, and let me look into it to see if you are doing it correctly."

I have become convinced from my own experience that after a week or two of concentration and practice, it is possible to correct the wrongly placed consonants, and to know what to do in order to pronounce them rightly.

Voice teachers among the opera artistes placed the voices of chosen pupils from the dramatic department.

In the classes of diction they studied verse and learned to declaim. Here a great deal depended on the instructor himself. Those who loved false pathos, which they claimed was necessary for tragedy, taught the chanting of words, but others, who preferred inner pathos, tried to achieve simplicity and power by delving into the essence of what was read. Of course, this was incomparably harder, but it was also incomparably more true.

Parallel with this, some rôle was studied, either for a public performance or for the gala evenings held by the school for the sake of practice.

According to stories, Mikhail Shchepkin could approach his pupils, look into their souls and possess himself of their emotions so that they understood him at once. How he did it is a mystery about which no evidence is left except some few of his letters to Shumsky, to Alexandra Schubert, to Gogol and Annenkov.

When the rôle was played, each new performance was regarded as a rehearsal, after which the pupil was praised or criticized, and the necessary explanations given to him. If the pupil failed, he was told why he failed, what it was he lacked, what demanded most work on his part, what was good. Praise, of course, encouraged him, and the other remarks led him in the proper direction. But if he were conceited, his teachers did not use any ceremonies with him. They *taught* in the old days.

The heirs and successors of these great actors brought down to us the remnants of these simple, wise, unwritten traditions and teaching methods. They tried to advance along the path drawn by their teachers—some, like Fedotova, her husband Fedotov, Nadezhda Medvedeva, V. N. Davydov,[18] succeeded in interpreting the spiritual reality of the traditions. Others, less talented, understood them more superficially and talked more of their outer form than of their inner content. Still others talked only of acting methods, and not of art itself. These merely copied the outer style of Shchepkin while thinking that they taught *à la* Shchepkin. They simply showed a long procession of hackneyed stencils and taught how any given part *was acted,* explaining what the *result* of playing the part in the given manner would be.

Around a table covered with green cloth sat several actors and many laymen—pedagogues and officials, who were in no way connected with art. They decided by a majority vote, after one incomplete reading of some verse, the fate of both the talented ones and the dunces who were taking their examinations. My many years of experience have shown me that those who pass examinations with flying colours very seldom justify the hopes placed in them. A handsome novice with some experience in amateur dramatics can easily deceive even an experienced teacher during an examination, especially since the teacher wants to find a real talent in every new face. It is very pleasant to discover a great actor. It is pleasant to vaunt a talented pupil. However, true talent is often deeply hidden in the soul. It is not easy to lure it from its hiding-place. That is why many actors who are famous now were far from being first at the entrance examinations. And many of them, like Orlenev and Knipper, were refused admittance at one of our best theatrical schools. Compare this system of enrolment to the system which existed in the old theatre, and you will see the vast difference.

I, who had already acted much as an amateur, passed on the strength of my experience.

Each of the examiners must have felt about me:

"Of course, that's not what we want. He doesn't fit in at all. But he has height, a voice, a figure, and you don't often meet this combination on the stage."

Besides, I was acquainted with Glikeria Fedotova, who was one of the examiners. I had often been to her home and was a friend of her son's, a student of my age who loved the theatre and later became an actor at the Maly. Despite my bad reading I was accepted.

In my time they required a rather complete course of general culture, and many subjects of a general nature were compulsory. Learned professors crammed our heads with all sorts of information about the play we were rehearsing. This aroused thought, but our emotions remained quiescent. They described very picturesquely and eloquently the play and the parts, that is, told us of the final results of creative work, but said nothing of how we were to do it, what path or method we should use in order to arrive at the desired result. We were taught to play a given rôle, but we were not taught our craft. We felt the absence of fundamentals and system. We were taught practical methods without these methods being systematized scientifically. I felt like a piece of dough out of which they were baking a loaf of definite taste and shape.

Pupils were taught to read with the aid of instructions, so that each first learned to imitate his teachers. The pupils read very correctly, putting in all the commas and periods, observing every rule of grammar, and resembled one another in their outer form which, like a uniform, concealed the inner reality of the man. It was not for that the poet wrote his poems and ballads; it was not of that he talked in them; it was not important for him to know what readers tell us from the concert stage. I knew teachers who taught their pupils in the following way:

"Make your voice sharp and read. Strain yourself, thicken your voice. Read as you wish."

Another teacher, after he had seen a part of a school performance, came backstage and said indignantly:

"You did not move your head. When a man speaks he always moves his head."

It is necessary to explain the origin of this moving of the head. There was a celebrated actor who had many imitators. But he had the bad habit of nodding. And all his followers, forgetting that he was a gifted man with a wonderful talent and a marvellous technique, took from him neither of these qualities, which they could not take, but only his shortcoming: the nodding. Whole graduating classes left the theatrical school with nodding heads.

In a word, it was required of the pupils that they copy their teachers. And they imitated their teachers, but badly because they lacked talent and technique. They would have done it well if they had been allowed to do it in their own way. Perhaps it would have been incorrect, but at any rate it would have been sincere, truthful and natural, and one could believe them. One can do much in art, but it must be done artistically and convincingly.

Notwithstanding all the defects in the teaching of dramatic art in Russia, the spirit of Shchepkin managed to hold its own in the schools and the theatres, and reached us, though in a dying form, through the good work of talented individual teachers.

When I entered the theatrical school, I found myself in a group of pupils who were much younger than I. There were schoolboys and schoolgirls of fifteen, while I was one of the directors of the Musical Society and chairman of many charitable institutions. The difference between us and our attitude towards life was too great for me to feel at home in the school and among the pupils. To all this was added the impossibility of attending school regularly because of my work in the factory and the office. Remarks about my tardiness, the jests of my fellow pupils at my expense because of the privileges I enjoyed and they did not–all this became unbearable, and I left the school, after I had been there no more than three weeks. I had no regrets since Glikeria Fedotova, for whose sake I had entered the school, also left at about that time.

ADOLESCENCE

THE ALEXEYEV CIRCLE

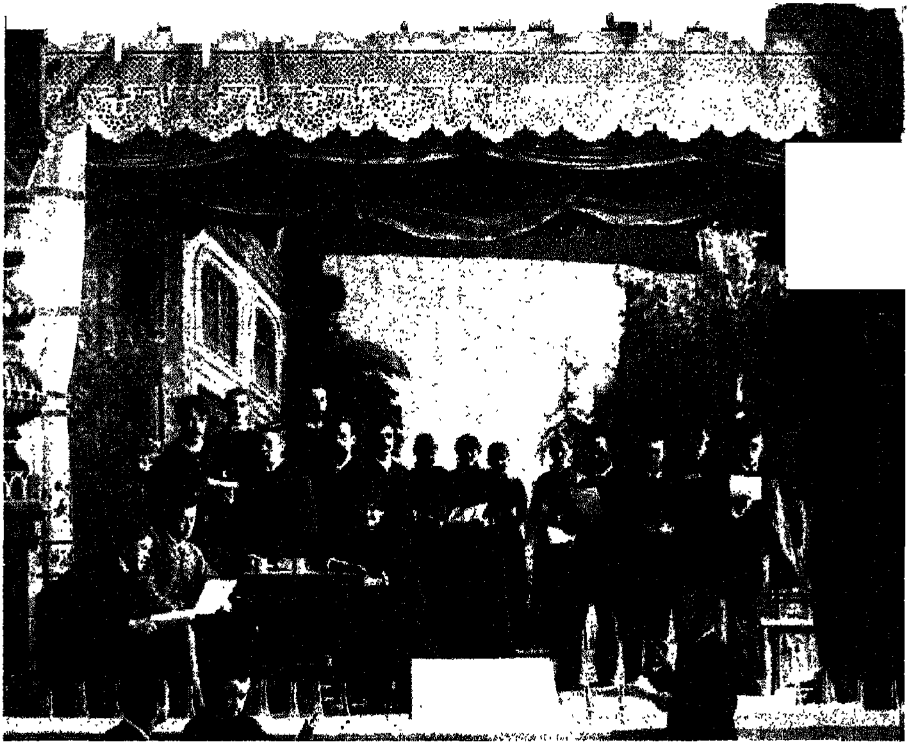
The Operetta

AT THE TIME I am speaking of the operetta reigned supreme in Moscow. The well-known manager Lentovsky built up a fine company of some really talented singers and actors. This energetic and exceptional man created something unique in theatrical enterprise, if we are to judge it by its richness and variety. A whole city block was turned into a park with hills, walks, lawns and ponds with clear water. This garden was called the Hermitage. It must not be confused with the Hermitage of today. There is nothing left of it now, as the entire block has long been built up. There was everything one could desire in this garden: boats in the ponds, remarkable displays of fireworks that represented naval battles and the sinking of warships; rope-walks across the ponds; water festivals with gondolas and illuminated boats; bathing nymphs, a shore ballet and a water ballet. There were many shaded lanes, mysterious summer-houses, and foot-paths with secluded benches on the banks of the ponds. The garden was illuminated by tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, lights, reflector shields and lamps. There were two theatres—one had a seating capacity of several thousand and was used for the operetta; the other, called "Anteus," shaped as a half-ruined Greek amphitheatre, was in the open air and was used for fairy melodramas. There were wonderful productions and fine orchestras, ballets, choruses and artistes, if we were to judge them by the standards of that time. Right alongside the theatre there were two large lawns with a stage for acrobatics and a huge open-air auditorium.

All that was famous in Europe in the realm of the open-air stage, from cabaret divas to hypnotists and eccentrics, found a welcome in the Hermitage. Those who were invited to Moscow saw their stock rise on the world entertainment market. The larger of the two lawns was given over to the circus, to animal trainers, aerial acts, wrestling, sports, and so forth. Processions, military bands, gypsy choruses, Russian folk singers—all were here. All Moscow and all visitors to Moscow came to the garden. The buffet did brisk business.

Family people, workers, aristocrats, cocottes, the golden youth, businessmen, all flocked to the Hermitage in the evenings, especially on stifling hot summer days. Lentovsky wanted family people to come to his garden, and did everything to uphold its morally spotless reputation. To do that he terrorized the public by circulating the most forbidding rumours about himself. He was supposed to have ejected a trouble-maker by seizing him by the scruff of the neck and throwing him over a fence. In order to bring a drunk to his senses he was rumoured to have bathed him in the pond. The cocottes feared him like fire and behaved themselves no worse than young ladies at the most aristocratic boarding schools. If any one of them did anything to spoil the good name of the Hermitage she was never admitted again, and that tore a hole in her finances.

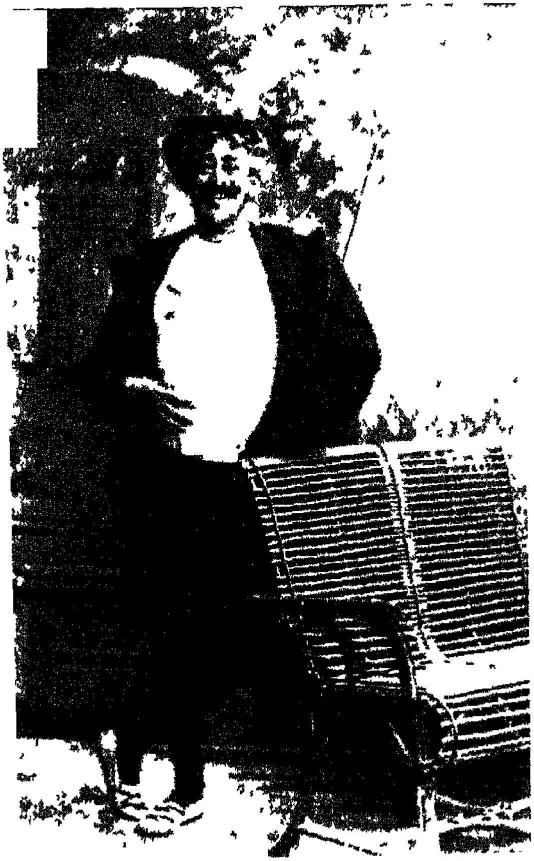
It could all be believed, for the manager was a powerful man, his physique was impressive and his shoulders broad, his Oriental beard black and thick, his



The Alexeyev Circle. A Rehearsal

hair cut long in the fashion of a Russian boyar. A Russian coat of thin black cloth and high lacquered boots gave his figure knightly grace. He wore a thick gold chain bedecked with all sorts of knick-knacks and gifts from famous personages and even royalty, a Russian cap with a large visor, and carried a tremendous cane that looked like a club and was the terror of all mischief-makers. He had a loud voice, an energetic, convincing manner of walking and would appear unexpectedly in some corner of his garden, and watch all that was going on with a falcon eye.

The Hermitage, a favourite with all the young people of that time, became a model for our imitation, and the dream of our theatrical desires. Not only the actors of the operetta, but even the outdoor attractions drew us like magnets. We also wanted to build a stage for music, we also wanted vari-



As Laverger in the opera-vaudeville *Love Potion* (1892)

coloured lamps and tables for those that wished to drink tea and light beverages, and an aerial programme and fireworks on the river. All this was to be continuous, exactly as it was in the Hermitage. No sooner was the performance in the theatre over than an orchestra would strike up outside. No sooner was that over than a new performance would begin in the theatre. One can easily imagine how much work was necessary to arrange such an affair for only one evening—we did not have enough public for another. We did the greater part of the job of illuminating and decorating the garden ourselves because we did not have enough money to hire help. And parallel with this work in the summer of 1884 we rehearsed *Mascotte,* an operetta with a large chorus and cast, in which I, needless to say, played the handsome shepherd Pipo. I still turn red with shame every time I look at my portrait in that rôle. All that is bad in confectionery or barber-shop beauty was taken for my make-up—curled moustaches, curled hair, tightly clad legs. And all this for a simple shepherd who lived near to nature! This shows just how absurd an actor can be when he is bent on looking his best on the stage. I depended heavily on the usual operatic gestures and fly-blown tricks. My singing, of course, was very amateurish.

As Pipo in Audran's light opera *Mascotte* (1884)

The other actors were rather nice in their parts The choruses were composed of all the relatives and friends who had the slightest pretension to voice. Our entire company put in a lot of hard work. They were all forced to come almost daily to the village to rehearse Like my elder brother and I, they came at seven in the evening, after office hours, and would after supper rehearse from nine o'clock until two or three in the morning. And some had to rise at six to go to Moscow, and return for the evening rehearsal. I have no idea how we kept it up, all the more so since quite often we did not sleep at all, because after rehearsal we young men would go into a large room reserved for ourselves and the choristers and fool and joke till dawn. The room was full of beds, with only a small passage in the centre. You may well imagine what took place there. We joked and punned, gossiped and laughed, and imitated animals and aped monkeys by leaping from a wardrobe. Or we went swimming in the river, staged circus performances and did gymnastics. Sometimes we climbed to the roof of the house. Affairs reached such a stage that the ceiling of the room cracked. It became necessary to disencumber our room and put the choristers in other rooms. But that made little difference, for we continued to visit one another in groups.

Both indoors and outdoors the affair was crowned with success. But we the actors did not receive a jot of good from the performance. Just the opposite; there was only harm. I, for one, became more rooted in my mistakes.

Nevertheless, the operetta and vaudeville are a good school for actors. It was not for nothing that our old actors always began their careers in the operetta or in vaudeville, studying there the fundamentals of dramatic art and developing their technique. Voice, diction, gesture, movement, light rhythm, quick tempo, unforced and sincere gaiety which easily infects the spectator are the first necessity in the light genre. Moreover, the light genre needs a certain piquant grace, a certain chic, without which it becomes as stale as champagne without gas. Another good point in it was that it did not overburden the soul with deep emotions, did not confront the young actor with over-difficult problems and at the same time demanded the technique of a virtuoso. We could not be satisfied with anything less, for our highly developed tastes demanded subtle and artistic operetta.

As luck would have it, I was tall, awkward, ungraceful and had a faulty diction. I was extraordinarily clumsy. Whenever I entered a small room its occupants hurried to remove all breakable objects in it, for I had a knack for smashing things. Once at a ball I overturned a palm-tree in a barrel. At another time, while dancing, I tripped, caught hold of a piano which, as it later turned out, had a defective leg, and dragged it down to the floor with me.

All this made me notoriously clumsy. I did not even dare suggest that I wanted to be an actor, for that would only cause laughter among my friends.

I had to struggle to overcome my shortcomings, train my voice, improve my diction and gestures, undergo tortures in my creative search. Working on myself became a mania with me.

The summer that year was a hot one, but I decided not to go to the country. I made those sacrifices to continue my studies in the empty city house. There, before a tremendous mirror in the large hall, I found it pleasant to work over my gestures and plastics, while the marble walls and staircase gave my voice a welcome resonance. Every day that summer and autumn, after I returned from the office, I worked according to a programme I had drawn up, from seven o'clock in the evening till three or four in the morning.

It is impossible to recount everything I did during that time. All that came to hand, whatever it might be,–a rug, a piece of cloth, an article of clothing, a gentleman's or a lady's hat, was used for the creation of the outward image, which I created myself. Watching myself in the mirror I came to know my own body and familiarized myself with plastics. I was inexperienced then and did not suspect the evil of working before a mirror. Nevertheless that work had its good sides. I came to know the shortcomings of my body and the outward manner of combating them, and I achieved some success in mastering theatrical plastics, which helped me to cope with a new genre, the French musical comedy, made famous at that time by that remarkable French actress *Anna Judic–the idol of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Paris, and the whole of* France. That brought me a step closer to dramatic art.

My sisters returned from Paris raving about Anna Judic. They had seen her in *Lili.* In this four-act operetta there were but few characters, but it had many musical and dramatic merits. My sisters did more than tell us the story of the piece in an orderly, almost stenographic fashion; they sang us all songs. Only the fresh memory of youth is capable of remembering so well a performance seen once or twice.

We immediately began to write down the text. Russian translation is usually longer than the French original. We decided on short phrases, no longer than the French.

Each of the translated phrases was examined by the one who was to say it. Each was to give the actor an opportunity to intone and accent it in the French manner. Happily, almost all of us actors knew French well and understood its musicalness and nuances. It was not in vain that there was French artistic blood in my family. Some of us, especially my eldest sister, achieved perfection, but because of poor diction it was impossible to tell whether she spoke in French or Russian. It is true that, like the rest of us, she made little of the meaning of the phrase and used it more for the sake of sound and French intonation. The spectators saw a performance in Russian and thought that it was being given in French, for often it was impossible to get the meaning of the words. Even in movement and action we found a rhythm and tempo that were more typically French than Russian. We knew and felt the ways and manners of French speech.

The *mises-en-scène* were, of course, slavishly copied from the Paris production, as described by my sisters.

I rapidly mastered the French mannerisms of speech and movement for my rôle, and this at once made me feel free on the stage. Perhaps I failed to present the type created by the author, but there is no doubt that I succeeded in portraying a true Frenchman. And this, after all, was real success, for if I did imitate, it was not the stage I imitated, but life. Feeling the national characteristics of the part, I found it easy to justify the tempo and the rhythm of my movements and speech. This was no longer tempo for the sake of tempo, rhythm for the sake of rhythm; this was an inner rhythm, although one of a general character, *typical* of all Frenchmen and not of the individual type I played.

Stanislavsky as Nanki-Pu and his sister Anna Shteker as Yum-Yum in Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1887)

The *première* was a huge success and was repeated many times before packed houses. Admission was free. The possibility of repeating our performances filled us with pride. It meant we were becoming successful. The heroine of the evening was my sister, and I enjoyed some success too.

Did I draw anything artistically useful from this performance? I should say I did. On the one hand copying the French language smoothed our heavy speech and gave it certain sharpness, mellowing our natural Russian vagueness. On the other hand, thanks to the story of the play and the nature of its rôles, we were obliged to develop a new and versatile approach to character. Thus, in the first act I was a young soldier by the name of Piu-Piu, a slick officer of twenty-five in the second, and an old retired, gouty general in the last. Although the character I sought was always skin-deep, but still it prompted me at times to probe deeper. This method is possible in artistic work, though it is far from being the best. At any rate, it helped me with my rôle as once before when I played the student in *The Practical Man.*

The next winter season saw our home circle preparing the production of the Sullivan operetta *The Mikado* (scenery by K. A. Korovin; directed by my brother, V. S. Alexeyev).

All that winter our home resembled a corner of Japan. A family of Japanese acrobats, who were appearing at the circus, stayed with us day and night. They proved to be very decent and were of great help. They taught us all the Japanese customs, the manner of walking, deportment, bowing, dancing, handling a fan. It was good exercise for the body. On their instructions, we had Japanese rehearsal costumes with obis made for all the actors, and we practised putting these on. The women walked all day with legs tied together at the knees, the fan became a necessary object of everyday life. We got the Japanese habit of talking with the help of a fan.

Returning from the office or the factory, we donned our Japanese costumes and wore them all evening, and all day on holidays. At dinner or at tea there sat Japanese men and women with fans which crackled when they were sharply opened and closed.

We had Japanese dancing classes and the women learned all the enchanting habits of the geishas. We knew how to turn rhythmically on our heels, showing now the right, now the left profile; how to fall to the floor, doubling up like gymnasts; how to run with mincing steps; how to jump, coquettishly lifting our heels. Some of the women learned to throw the fan in the dance so that it might describe a semi-circle in its flight and reach the hands of another dancer or singer. We learned to juggle with the fan, to throw it over a shoulder or a leg, and what is most important, mastered all the Japanese poses with the fan, without exception, of which a whole series was distributed in the songs and in the text exactly like notes in music. In this manner, every passage, bar of music, and strong note had its definite gesture, movement and action with the fan. In the mass scenes, that is in the chorus, each of the singers was given his own series of gestures and movements with the fan for each accented musical note, bar, and passage. The poses with the fan depended on the arrangement of the groups, or rather on a kaleidoscope of continually changing and moving groups. While some swept their fans upward, others lowered and opened theirs near their very feet; others did the same to the right, still others to the left, and so on.

It was a thrilling sight when this kaleidoscope came into action in the mass scenes, and fans of every size, colour and description flew through the air. Many platforms were prepared so that from the forestage where the actors lay on the floor to the background where they stood several feet above ground, the entire arc of the low stage could be filled with the fans. They covered it like a curtain. The platforms offer an old but convenient method to the stage director for theatrical groupings. Add to the description of the performance the picturesque costumes, many of which were really Japanese, the ancient armour of samurais, the banners, real Japanese life, our original plastics, our artistic skill, the juggling and acrobatics, the rhythm of the whole show, the dances, the good-looking faces of the women and youths, our youthful ardour and temperament, and it will be clear that there was enough to make it highly successful.

Strange and inexplicable as it may seem, there was only one blot in it—myself. As a stage director of the performance, I helped my elder brother to find a new tone and style of production, but as an actor I was loath to part from the banal, theatrically operatic, postcard beauty. Having worked out my movements in that hall of which I have already spoken, I could not give them up, and tried to be a handsome Italian singer in the Japanese operetta. How could I disfigure my tall, thin figure in a Japanese manner, when I had always dreamed of making it straight! In this manner, as an actor I again rooted myself in my old mistakes and operatic banality.

We were tired of operettas and decided to make our next performance a dramatic production. It would not be worth while speaking of it, if it had not influenced my development as an actor. In this performance I attempted to play a tragic rôle in a vaudeville skit called *A Peculiar Disaster*. The subject was most banal—in order to give his wife a lesson and revive her love for him, the husband stages a tragedy. He pretends to have taken poison which has an immediate deadly result, but it all ends well—with an explanation and kisses.

I did not need this skit to play a comedy part and make my public laugh, but to try out my abilities as a tragedian and to shock my audience. I foolishly persisted in attaining the unattainable. This caused many farcical scenes during the rehearsals and the performance.

"How did I impress you?" I asked after a rehearsal.

"I don't know, not much to tell you the truth," a spectator would confess.

"Well, and now?"

And I would run to the stage and strain myself more than before, making it worse.

But my make-up was not bad; add my youth, a loud voice, theatrical effectiveness, good examples which I copied, and in the end there were people who liked it. And as there exists no actor who has no admirers of his own, I had some in this rôle, and I recognized only their competence to judge me, and explained away all the uncomplimentary remarks as jealousy, foolishness and lack of understanding.

There are so many reasons to justify one's own mistakes and false enthusiasm that one is never at a loss for an explanation. I had a whole arsenal of justifications to convince myself that I was a born tragedian. Even in a vaudeville I managed to shake the souls of my admirers. But I was greatly mistaken. The hues of tragedy are more noticeable, brighter, and more striking than those of comedy, and all my mistakes therefore seemed greater this time. It is unpleasant when one takes a false note in half voice, but it is much more unpleasant when one does it in full voice. This time I took a false note in full voice. Nevertheless, I had played my first tragic rôle!

RIVAL

IT WAS AT THIS TIME that there appeared a circle which became our rival in home theatricals–the Mamontov Circle.

Earlier in the book I promised to say a few words about this remarkable man who made a name for himself not only in art but also in public life.

It was Savva Ivanovich Mamontov who built the northern railway to Arkhangelsk and Murmansk, and the southern line to the Donets coal fields. Yet, when he launched this important cultural project, he was ridiculed and called a swindler and adventurer. It was Mamontov, too, who, patronizing the opera and advising actors in such matters as make-up, costume, gesture, and even singing, and guiding them in the general task of creating stage portrayals, gave a mighty impetus to the development of the Russian opera. It was he who discovered Chaliapin and who, with the latter's help, brought fame to Mussorgsky, thereto unrecognized and unsung, who ensured brilliant success to Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Sadko* and inspired him to write *The Tsar's Bride* and *Saltan,* which were especially composed and first performed in the Mamontov opera house. In his theatre, too, where he personally directed and produced several magnificent operas, we saw for the first time, instead of the conventional crude scenery, the marvellous creations of Vasnetsov, Polenov, Serov and Korovin, who, together with Repin, Antokolsky and other first-rate Russian artists of the time, literally grew up and lived in Mamontov's home as members of his family. Who knows, perhaps the great Vrubel, too, might have failed to achieve world fame had it not been for Mamontov's assistance. Vrubel's paintings were not accepted for the All-Russian Exhibition in Nizhny-Novgorod, and even Mamontov's energetic intercession was of no avail: the judges would not reconsider their verdict. Undaunted, Mamontov built a separate pavilion for Vrubel's works with his own money. The paintings attracted public attention, won many admirers, and eventually made their author famous.

Mamontov's house was in Sadovaya Street, quite close to ours. It was a sanctuary for young talented painters, sculptors, actors, musicians, singers and dancers. Mamontov knew and loved the arts. Once or twice each year he staged performances for children in his house, and sometimes for adults. Oftener than not the plays were his own or his son's. Now and then composers he knew would produce an opera or an operetta. Mamontov himself wrote the libretto of the opera *Kamorra*. Plays by well-known dramatists were also produced, such as Ostrovsky's *Snow Maiden,* for which Victor Vasnetsov painted the scenery and designed the costumes, which were later reproduced in many illustrated art publications. These famous productions, unlike the productions of our Alexeyev Circle, were always staged in a hurry, during Christmas or Shrovetide school vacations. The play was rehearsed and costumed, the scenery designed and painted, all within two weeks. During this time work went on day and night, and the house would become one huge workshop. Young people and children, relatives and friends came to help in a body from all the ends of the city. Some mixed paint, others primed the canvases, still others prepared the props. The ladies sewed costumes under the supervision of the artists themselves, who would now and then be called upon to explain their ideas. Tables would be placed for cutting in every corner; the costumes were tried on the actors who would be called from the rehearsal for that purpose, and volunteer and professional tailors worked day and night. In still another corner the musician would go through an aria or a couplet with some young singer, often possessing little or no musical talent.

All this work went on to the accompaniment of the tattoo of carpenters' hammers that reverberated throughout the house from Mamontov's spacious study and workroom, where they were building a stage. Without taking the slightest notice of the din one of the stage directors would rehearse the play with the actors. Another rehearsal would be taking place near the main stairway in the hall, which was always full of people coming in or going out of the house. All misunderstandings regarding acting and stage direction were straightened out by the chief stage director, i.e., Mamontov.

He sat in the large dining-room at the tea table that was never bare of food. The room was always full of people volunteering to help him with the production. Oblivious of the racket, Mamontov would be writing the play while its first acts were being rehearsed upstairs. The text was copied on the spot the minute he finished it and given to an actor who would rush upstairs and rehearse the scene that had just been written. Mamontov had a remarkable ability of working in public and doing several things at one and the same time. He managed the entire production process while writing the play, jested with young people, dictated business letters and telegrams and looked after the complicated mechanism of the railway firm of which he was the owner and manager.

The result of the two weeks' work was a peculiar performance that amazed and at the same time made one angry. On the one hand, there were the wonderful scenery by the best artists, and the stage directors' idea creating a new era in decorative art and forcing the best theatre producers in Moscow to sit up and take notice. On the other hand, this wonderful background was used for completely inexperienced amateurs, who usually not only had no time to rehearse their parts well, but who could not even remember them. The incredible amount of work put in by the prompter, the helpless pauses of the timid actors, who spoke too softly to be heard, stage fright that made their gestures look like convulsions, the utter lack of technique, robbed the play of artistry and made everything–play itself, the fine idea of the stage director and the wonderful scenery–superfluous. True, now and then some performer would reveal a flash of talent, for among them there were several real actors. Then, while the actor was there the whole stage would come to life for a time.

These performances seemed to have been staged for the sole purpose of showing the unnecessariness of the production and beautiful scenery when the most important personage in the theatre–the talented actor–is missing. It was at these performances that I learned this truth, and saw with my own eyes what polish, good team-work and adequate rehearsals meant for creative work in the theatre. I became convinced that in chaos there can be no art. Art is order, grace. What do I care how long they worked on the production, a day or a year? Do I ask an artist how many years he has spent on a painting? What is important to me is that the collective stage creation be whole and complete and that those who took a hand in it strive for the common creative goal. It is strange that Mamontov himself, who was such a sensitive artiste, found a peculiar joy in the very carelessness and hurry of his theatre work. We always argued and quarrelled with him over that, and it was this that led to certain rivalry and antagonism between his circle and ours. Nevertheless that did not prevent me from taking part in Mamontov's productions[19] or from admiring the work of the artists and stage directors. As an actor, however, I never received anything but bitter disappointment from these shows.

Mamontov's productions contributed much to the decorative art of the Russian theatre; they aroused the interest of talented artists, and from that time on, true painters gradually began to supplant the horrible house painters who were the only decorators the theatre had known in the past.

INTERREGNUM

Ballet—Opera Career—Amateurishness

THINGS WERE GOING pretty badly in the Alexeyev Circle. My sisters and one of my brothers got married, became parents, burdened themselves with new cares and worries and found no time for acting. There was no possibility of staging a new production, and for quite some time I was inactive. But fate was kind and would not allow me to idle my time away. Pending some new presentation, it pushed me into the realm of Terpsichore. That art is indispensable for the dramatic actor. I had no special intentions when I started attending ballets. In this period of "interregnum" I could not decide definitely on anything, and so I went to the ballet to see how my friends, inveterate balletomanes, were "making fools of themselves." I went to laugh—and got stuck myself.

Balletomanes regarded going to the theatre as a sort of a duty. They did not miss a single performance, but they invariably arrived late in order to walk ceremoniously down the centre aisle to their seats to the accompaniment of ballet music. It was quite another thing if *she*, the object of the balletomane's affections, was on the stage from the very beginning. Then he would take his seat during the overture. God forbid that he be late, she might be hurt! And when *she* was through with her number and was not followed by a recognized ballerina, the balletomane considered it beyond his dignity of a connoisseur to waste his time on nonentities. While the latter danced, he would go to the smoking-room (especially opened for such people as he) and remain there until the usher (especially employed for this purpose) informed him that *she* was about to start her dance. It did not matter that the object of the balletomane's affections was not a talented dancer. It was his duty to watch *her*. his eyes glued to the opera-glasses, when she danced and especially when she didn't. That is when they start "telegraphing" to each other.

To illustrate:

She was standing on the side while another girl was dancing. Looking across the footlights, at the seat where her admirer was, she smiled. That meant everything was all right, that she was not angry. If she had not smiled, but looked thoughtfully, sorrowfully over his head and then left with her eyes lowered, that would have meant that she was hurt, that she did not want to see him. Then everything would be wrong. The poor balletomane's heart would throb, his head would whirl. He would rush to his friend, feeling publicly insulted, and start whispering.

"Have you seen that?"

"I have," his friend would answer sadly.

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know. Were you in the lane yesterday?"

"I was."

"Did she smile? Did she blow you a kiss?"

"She did."

"Then I just don't understand."

"What should I do? Send her flowers?"

"You're crazy. Imagine sending flowers to a ballet school pupil. . . ."

"But then what?"

"Let me think. Wait! Mine is looking at me. . . . Bravo, bravo! Why don't you applaud?"

"Bravo, bravo, encore!"

"No, there won't be any encores. Listen, here's what we shall do. You buy flowers, I'll write a note and send it with the flowers to my girl and she'll pass them on and explain everything."

"That's topping! You're a real friend, always helping me out. I'll do it right away."

In the next act *she* appears with a flower in her corsage, looks at the guilty balletomane and smiles. And he jumps up and rushes to his friend.

"She's smiled, she's smiled! Thank God! But why was she angry, I wonder."

"Come over after the show and my girl will tell you."

After the show the balletomane must take the object of his affections home. Those who are in love with the dancers of the ballet school wait for them at the stage door. And here is what happens. A stage-coach comes up for the girls. The young man opens the front door, i.e., the one nearer to the stage entrance. *She* jumps in and goes to the opposite side, i.e., to the back door, and bars it with her body. Then she lets the window down, *he* comes up and kisses her hand or slips a note or says something short but very important that will make her think all through the night. In the meantime, the other ballet school girls enter the coach by the front door.

But there were daring balletomanes who would kidnap the girl, put her into a waiting carriage and order the coach to take them at breakneck speed through some streets. By the time the stage-coach arrived at the ballet school, the fugitives would be there. *He* would help the lady of his heart into the back door of the coach while the other girls were leaving by the front door, concealing the whole escapade from the chaperone. But that was a difficult thing and required from the balletomane to bribe the coachman and the doorman.

Having taken his lady love home, the balletomane would go to his friend's, or rather to his sweetheart's. And here he would get his explanation–and a very simple one. Why had *she* been displeased? On the previous day he and other balletomanes were in the lane adjoining the ballet school at the appointed hour and the girls were blowing them kisses and signalling to them. Just at that moment the instructress on duty appeared in the window below and the young men scattered away. The others returned a little later, but he did not and her friends laughed at her. That was why she had been displeased.

Unmarried dancers lived in furnished rooms and led a life that was very much akin to that of students in their attics. There were always many people, some would come with their own food, others would run and buy something, admirers would come with candy–and all that would be shared. It would be an impromptu supper or tea at a samovar. The gathering would criticize actresses and the theatre management, relate backstage incidents or–they always did that–discuss the latest shows. I loved such impromptu parties, for they gave me an opportunity to learn the secrets of ballet art. For one who does not intend to study a subject seriously, but just wants to get a general understanding of it because he may have to study it more thoroughly later on, it is useful and interesting to attend such discussions at which specialists analyze something they have just seen, heard or personally experienced. These discussions and the arguments adduced did a great deal to acquaint me with the secrets of ballet technique. When a ballerina could not prove something by speech, she tried to do so with her legs, i.e., she danced. On more than one occasion I played the rôle of some dancer's partner and helped her to demonstrate her argument. Being clumsy, I sometimes dropped my partner and saw where I had erred in some technical method or trick. Add to that the eternal arguments that went on among the balletomanes in the smoking-room, where I too was a habitué and where I met clever and well-read aesthetes–who discussed dances and plastics not from the angle of outer technique, but from that of how they impressed them artistically and creatively, and you will see that perhaps I had adequate grounds for considering myself amply equipped for research in this sphere. I repeat that I assimilated all this without having any aim in view, for I attended ballets not because I wanted to study them, but because I liked the mysterious, picturesque and poetic life of the theatre.

Have you ever stopped to think how beautiful and quaint is the background on the stage, illuminated by blue, red, violet and other lights? With a dreamy river "flowing" in the distance? A vast darkness rising endlessly, it seems, towards the roof; a mysterious depth in the trapdoor. Picturesque groups of actors and actresses, in costumes of different cut and colour, waiting to go on to the stage. And during the interval–bright lights, hustle and bustle, chaos, work. Canvases depicting mountains, rocks, rivers, seas, cloudless sky, stormy clouds, beautiful foliage and the Inferno go up and come down. Stage hands push the walls of pavilions, colonnades, arches and other architectural parts, tired, perspiring, their faces grimy, and next to them an ethereal ballerina doing the last movements before going into her dance on the stage. Musicians in their tail-coats, ushers in their uniforms, slick officers and well-dressed young balletomanes. The noise, the hum of human voices, the tension–a regular babel that fades away as the curtain goes up to give way to an orderly, harmonious picture. If there are any wonders on earth, they are on the stage!

How, in the circumstances, can one help falling in love? And I was in love too and for a full six months I ogled one of the girls from the ballet school who, they told me, was madly in love with me, and I too thought that she smiled at me and signalled to me. I was introduced to her when the girls were going home for Christmas holidays. But, to my horror, it turned out that for half a year I had been looking at one girl and talking about another. But this other was nice too and I immediately fell in love with her. Everything was childishly naïve, mysterious, poetic and, what is more important, clean and pure. It is wrong to think that immorality reigns supreme in ballet. I didn't see it, and I always think with pleasure of the good times it afforded me, of my infatuations and loves. Ballet is a beautiful art, but . . . not for us dramatic actors. We need something else. Different plastics, different grace, different rhythm, gesture, gait and movements. Different everything! But we can certainly emulate ballet workers' industriousness and ability to train their body.

At the time I was in love with the ballet the famous Italian dancer Zucchi, then on a tour in Moscow, visited us very often. After dinner she sometimes danced on our stage.

In those days, my brothers had a hunchbacked tutor and according to an Italian superstition, if one wants to be lucky, one must embrace and kiss a hunchback so many times. Zucchi was very superstitious. And so we talked her into staging *Esmeralda,* as a charity performance in our home theatre and asked the hunchback to play Quasimodo. What with rehearsals, she would have ample opportunity to embrace and kiss him the necessary number of times. I took upon myself to count how many times she did it.

Zucchi directed the ballet and played the title part. We came to know her as a dancer, director and actress. That was all that we needed. Being superstitious, Zucchi took the job very seriously. She had to conduct the rehearsals in such a way so as to make the hunchback believe in the necessity of what we were doing. We admired and watched closely the work of a great talent, and learned much that was interesting and instructive. She was first of all a dramatic actress, and only after that a dancer, although she was a great dancer too. These rehearsals revealed that she possessed limitless imagination, ingenuity, resourcefulness, originality and taste in the choice of new stage problems and *mises-en-scène*, unusual adaptiveness and what is more important, a naive, childish faith in what she was doing on the stage at the moment and what was taking place around her. She gave this all her attention whole-heartedly and completely.

I was also struck by the ease and softness of her muscles in moments of great spiritual stress, both in the drama and ballet sequences when I partnered her. I myself always felt rigid on the stage and my imagination was always drowsy, for I always copied others. My ingenuity, adaptiveness and taste all served to make myself resemble the actors whom I was imitating. I had no opportunity to use my own taste and originality, because I used those of others, those which were always ready to hand. I gave my attention not to what was happening on the stage, but to what had once happened on other stages whence I took my examples. I did not do what I felt myself but repeated what someone else had felt. But one cannot live with the feelings of another person unless one makes these feelings one's own. That is why I was helpless on the stage, and my helplessness caused physical strain. Zucchi forced me to think of all this, but I still did not know how to correct my mistake.

After the ballet, under the influence of Mamontov, the opera reigned supreme among my artistic interests. The seventies saw the Russian national opera on the upsurge. Chaikovsky and other musical celebrities began to compose for the theatre. I was carried away by the general enthusiasm and, deciding that I was born to be a singer, began to prepare for a career in the opera.

I took lessons from the famous tenor Fyodor Komissarzhevsky, the father of the famous actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya and Fyodor Komissarzhevsky, well-known stage director. Each day after work, I went to the other end of the city to my new friend for a lesson in singing. I don't know what brought me more good, the lessons or our conversations after them.

When it seemed to me that I was ready for the opera it was decided to stage one. My teacher, F. P. Komissarzhevsky, was aching to return to the stage; he also wanted to play. Our dining-room theatre was unoccupied, so we used it. I was rehearsing two scenes, the duet of Mephistopheles and Faust (Komissarzhevsky), and the first act of Dargomizhsky's *The Mermaid* in which I was to sing the part of the Miller and Komissarzhevsky was to be the Prince. Moreover, there were numbers for the other pupils of Komissarzhevsky, in which real singers appeared, with voices much better than mine. At the second rehearsal I became hoarse, and the more I sang the hoarser I became.

What a pity! How pleasant and unusually easy it is to play in an opera, play and not sing. Especially if you have no voice and rely solely on acting. All is ready-made by the composer; all you have to do is to sing what has been written, and your success is assured. It is impossible not to be carried away by the creations of a good composer. The music, the orchestration, the musical *leit-motif* are so clear and eloquent, it seems even a dead man could play. Only one must not get into one's own way; one must yield entirely to the magic power of sound. Besides, I found it easy to play because the operatic clichés of Mephistopheles and the Miller are so definite, clear and well-known. Imitate–that is all you have to do. My ideals were confined to those words at that time. I wanted to resemble a Real Actor, in general, and my current idol, in particular.

The production did not go any further than the dress rehearsal, since it became clear that it would not add any glory to my name. Besides, because of daily rehearsals, my voice grew worse and worse, until it became only a hoarse whisper.

Standing on the same stage with good singers I understood that my voice was not fit for the opera and that I did not have sufficient musical experience. I realized that I would never be a singer and that it was necessary for me to forget the idea of launching on an operatic career.

The singing lessons stopped but I still saw Komissarzhevsky almost daily, to speak with him about art and to meet at his house musicians and singers, and the professors of the Conservatoire where Komissarzhevsky taught voice culture and I was one of the directors. Confidentially speaking, I entertained the idea of becoming his assistant, and teaching a rhythm class, but I did not dare speak of it. Rhythmic acting to music had made an indelible impression on me and I could not help noticing how singers succeeded in uniting several completely different rhythms in one same breath. The orchestra and the composer have their own rhythm and time. Singers are in complete accord with them, but choristers lift and lower their hands automatically in another rhythm, move in yet another. Each of the singers, ruled only by his mood or his digestion, acts, or rather does not act, in his own rhythm, or rather without any rhythm.

I tried to prove to Komissarzhevsky the necessity of setting up a class of physical rhythm for singers. He liked my idea. We had already found an accompanist-improvisor, and in the evenings we lived, moved and sat silently in rhythm.

Unfortunately, the Conservatoire refused to let Komissarzhevsky start the proposed class, and we dropped our experiments. But even now, as soon as I hear music, rhythmic movement and mimetics in the same form I felt them at that time surge in me.

Involuntarily those vague emotions broke out in me on the stage also, but I could not understand what it was that controlled me when I swam on the crest of this or that rhythmic wave.

I had stumbled across the field of rhythm but not taken cognizance of it. I laid my ideas aside. But subconsciously I apparently continued to study the problem. But of that–later.

And so, singing was not my vocation. What should I do? Return to the operetta, to amateur theatricals at home? I couldn't. I had learned too much from Komissarzhevsky about the lofty aims and tasks of art.

Moreover, as I have already said, our home troupe had fallen apart.

All that was left to me was the drama. But I knew that the latter form of scenic art was the most impregnable for the student. I stood at the crossroads and did not know which road to take.

At this time of indecision fate gave me another lesson, one extremely valuable for my artistic development.

A charity performance was given at our home theatre. The attraction was that several actors of the Maly Theatre played with us, the amateurs of the Alexeyev Circle. We produced *The Lucky Man* by Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, who was at that time the most popular and talented playwright in Russia. Among those who took part were the famous Glikeria Fedotova, Olga Sadovskaya, and other artistes of our wonderful Maly Theatre, to which

I owed so much. I felt I was a nonentity in the company of these great artistes who moved me by their splendid attitude towards us.

The play was from the repertoire of the Maly Theatre, where it had been staged scores of times. But for us amateurs it was altogether new. The rehearsals, needless to say, were held for our sake and not for the actors of the Maly Theatre. Nevertheless, the famous actors who had played in the drama so many times came half an hour before rehearsal, appeared on the stage at the appointed time, and waited for the amateurs (of course, not for me).

The Maly actors rehearsed in full tone while the amateurs whispered their lines and read the text from manuscript. True, they were all very busy people who had no free time at all. But what did art or the actors or the theatre care for that?

It was the first time that I stood on the stage with highly talented actors and it was a landmark in my life. But I was timid, I was confused, I was angry at myself; I did not understand their advice although out of timidity I hastened to say that I did. My chief care was not to anger them, not to disturb them, to remember, to copy what was told me. This was exactly the opposite of what is needed for true creativeness. But I could not do otherwise. They could not make the rehearsals lessons in dramatic art, all the more so because I had just left the Dramatic School and with it Glikeria Fedotova, at whose side I was now playing as a full-fledged actor.

Because of my amateurish inexperience the pillars of my part, in actors' parlance, would not hold. My ardour would flame up and then suddenly die down. This made my speech and action energetic and my voice loud, the words sounded clearly and reached the audience–and then everything would grow dull and I wilted, my voice would drop to a murmur, my words could not be heard, and the spectators at the rehearsal would cry, "Louder! Louder!"

Of course, I could force myself to speak loudly, to act energetically, but when you force yourself to be loud for the sake of loudness, courageous for the sake of courage, without any inner meaning and inspiration, you feel ashamed to be on the stage. This cannot put you into a creative mood. And alongside me were real true-to-goodness artistes who always seemed to be full of vigour. Something seemed to hold their energy at the same high temperature and prevented it from sinking. They could not help but speak loudly on the stage; they could not help being lively. They may have heartaches or headaches or pains in the throat, but they will nevertheless act energetically and speak loud. It was altogether different with us amateurs. We needed somebody to warm us, to encourage us, to make us happy. We did not hold the public in our hands. Just the opposite, we expected it to take us into its hands, encourage us, say something complimentary, and then perhaps we would feel like playing.

"Why is it so?" I asked Fedotova.

"You don't know, my friend, from which end to begin. And you don't want to learn," Fedotova said, softening the hard words with her singsong voice and caressing intonation. "You have no experience, no restraint, no discipline. And an actor cannot get along without that."

"And how can I work out that discipline?" I asked again.

"Play a little oftener with us, and we will teach you, my friend. We are not always like today. We can be strict when the need for it comes. Oh, my friend, we can scold. Oh, how we can scold! And the actors of today sit with folded hands and wait for inspiration from Apollo. In vain, my friend, he has enough of his own affairs to attend to."

And true enough, when the curtain went up, the trained actors began speaking in the proper tone and lassoed us along. You couldn't drowse with them, you couldn't let the tone down. It even seemed to me that I played inspiringly. Alas, it only seemed so to me. My rôle was far from being polished.

The training and discipline of real actors manifested themselves still more vividly when *The Lucky Man* was repeated with almost the same cast, that is with the actors of the Maly Theatre and myself, in another city–Ryazan.

I had been abroad and just returned home. At the station I saw Glikeria Fedotova's son, who also acted in the play. He came on behalf of all of the cast to ask me to help them out. It was necessary to go at once to Ryazan to replace A. Yuzhin, an actor of the Maly Theatre who had fallen ill. It was impossible to refuse and I went though I was tired after my long journey, and without seeing my parents who were waiting for me at home. We travelled to Ryazan in a second-class compartment. I was given a book to go through my part, which I had half forgotten, for I had never known it well, having played it only once. The noise in the car, the babble and bustle made my head whirl and I could hardly make out what I was reading. I could not remember the text and I was almost in despair because the thing I feared most on the stage was a poorly memorized text.

"When we arrive, I hope to God there is an unoccupied room, where I can be alone long enough to go attentively through the part at least once," I wished.

But fate willed it otherwise. The performance was to be given not in the theatre but in some regimental club: a small amateur stage, and near it a room divided into sections by screens. This room contained everything, dressing-rooms for both men and women, and a tea-room where a samovar was going full blast. They also squeezed the military band into the room in order to free as many seats as possible in the auditorium. When the band began to blow and the drums to beat while we were dressing and making up, I almost fainted. I threw down my text and decided to rely on the prompter, who happily was a very good one.

When I came on the stage, it seemed to me that someone whistled–again–once more–stronger. I could not understand what was happening. I stopped, looked at the audience and saw that some of the spectators were whistling me down.

"Why? What have I done?"

Later I learned that they had whistled at me because I had come instead of Yuzhin. I became so confused that I went back into the wings.

So, I got baptized!

I cannot say that it was pleasant. But I did not find anything particularly terrible about it. On the contrary, I was rather glad, for that gave me the right to play badly. A bad performance could be interpreted as my reply to the insult, as unwillingness to play well after the whistling. This encouraged me, and I went out on the stage again. This time I was met with applause, but my pride was hurt and I treated it disdainfully, that is, I paid no attention to it, stood nonchalantly, as if the applause was not meant for me. It is only natural that I could not play an unprepared rôle well. This was my first experience with a prompter. How terrible it is to be on the stage without knowing the text. A real nightmare!

The performance was over at last. Still in our make-up we were taken to the station to go back to Moscow. But we missed the train and we were forced to spend the night in Ryazan. While we looked for rooms, the admirers of Fedotova and Sadovskaya arranged an impromptu supper. Oh, if you could see the sorry figure I cut, pale from a headache, with weakened legs, with a bent back, with muscles that altogether refused to serve me. In the middle of the supper I fell asleep, while Fedotova, who was old enough to be my mother, was fresh, young, joyful, coquettish, talkative. She could be taken for my sister. Sadovskaya, who was also far from young, was running a close second to Fedotova.

"But I have just returned from abroad," I tried to justify myself.

"You are from abroad, but Mother has a temperature of 101," retorted Fedotova's son.

"That's experience and discipline for you!" I thought.

Thanks to frequent appearances in amateur theatricals, I became quite well-known among the Moscow amateurs. I was often invited to play in one-nighters and to take part in dramatic circles, where I came to know all the amateurs of the time, and worked under many stage directors. I had an opportunity to choose rôles and plays, and that gave me a chance to test myself in many parts, especially in those that were dramatic, and of which young men always dream. When a young man is strong and imaginative, he always tends to "tear passion to tatters." But, as I have already said, it is dangerous to sing Wagnerian parts with an unplaced voice. It is just as dangerous for a young man without the necessary technique to play dramatic parts that are too difficult for him. When you are called upon to perform the impossible, you naturally resort to tricks, and that leads you away from the main path of development. I relived this experience, which was much stronger this time, during my amateur wanderings, during the period of interregnum.

I played at all chance performances, in rapidly rising and rapidly disappearing dramatic circles, in dirty, cold, and small amateur halls, with terrible scenery, and very often in unpleasant society. The continual change of rehearsals, flirtation instead of work, gossip, and performances rapidly thrown together which the public attended only because of the dances that followed them, could not cool my ardour. Sometimes we played in unheated theatres. In the worst frosts I set up a dressing-room in my sister's house near by and in the intermissions I would hurry there in a cab to change costumes. When I returned, I sat behind the wings in a fur coat.

What a horror those amateur performances were! The humilities one had to put up with! I remember that at a certain vaudeville performance in which fifteen persons were to take part less than half turned up, and we, who were playing in another playlet on the same programme, were forced to act in the vaudeville skit without knowing a single line in it.

"But what are we to play?" we asked in amazement.

"It doesn't matter. Walk out and say whatever you wish. The performance must go on. The spectators have paid for their seats."

And we walked out on the stage and said whatever we could think of at the moment, and when we could say no more, we walked off. Others walked on and did exactly as we had done. And whenever the stage was empty, we would be pushed out again. Both we and the public roared with laughter at the senselessness of the whole thing. At the end we took many curtain calls and the manager was elated.

"You see," he cried, "and you did not want to go on!"

Often I was forced to play in the company of suspicious-looking people. What could I do? There were no other places where I could act, and I so wanted to act. Among these amateurs there were gamblers and demi-mondaines. And I, a man of position, a director of the Russian Musical Society, found that it was dangerous for my reputation if I associated with those people. It was necessary to take a stage name. I thought that it would hide my real identity. I had known an amateur, Doctor M., who was known on the stage as Stanislavsky. He had stopped playing, and I decided to adopt his Polish-sounding name, thinking that behind this name no one could ever recognize me. But I was greatly mistaken, as it turned out.

I was playing a comedy lover in a three-act French farce whose action took place in the dressing-room of an actress. With hair curled, in the costume of a dandy of the period, I flew out on the stage, carrying a tremendous bouquet. I flew out—and stopped. In the central box sat my father, my mother, my tutor and the old governesses of my sisters. And I remembered that in the following acts I would have to go through daring love scenes that had always been forbidden by our family censorship. Instead of a worldly, gallant young man I played a modest, well-reared boy. After the performance I returned home ashamed of myself and did not dare appear before the family. On the following day, my father settled the matter in one sentence.

"If you must play on the side, found a decent dramatic circle and get a decent repertoire, but for God's sake, don't appear in such trash as the play last night."

My old governess, who had known me since my days in the cradle, exclaimed: "I never, never thought that our Konstantin, who was such a good boy, could ever do a thing like that in public. It is terrible, terrible. Why did my eyes see it?"

But there was a practical result of my wanderings in amateur circles. I came to know some actors who later became leading figures in our amateur circle—The Society of Art and Literature, and still later passed into the ranks of the Moscow Art Theatre: Artyom,[20] Samarova,[21] Sanin[22] and Lilina.[23]

YOUTH

THE SOCIETY OF ART AND LITERATURE

AT THAT TIME there appeared in Moscow the famous stage director, playwright and actor Alexander Fedotov, husband of that distinguished actress, Glikeria Fedotova, and father of my friend Alexander Fedotov, whom I have already mentioned. He came, so to speak, to remind Moscow of his existence. Fedotov junior, naturally, took part in his father's production, and it was thanks to him that I was invited. The play was Racine's *Les Plaideurs* in Fedotov's translation. The leading rôle was in the hands of the amateur actor and aesthete Fyodor Sollogub, nephew of the well-known writer Count V. A. Sollogub. As for me, I played the hero in Gogol's one-act comedy *The Gamblers*. At this performance I met for the first time a really talented stage director–and Fedotov was one. Rehearsals under his direction and contact with him were the best possible school for me. He liked me, it seems, and wanted me to be friends with his family.

The performance was a big success. After it I could no longer return to my former amateurish wanderings.

All those who had taken part in Fedotov's affair did not want to part. We discussed setting up a large dramatic circle that might unite all amateurs and bring all other theatre workers in Moscow under the roof of a club where there would be no gambling. Fyodor Komissarzhevsky and I had long dreamed of that and there only remained to bring Fedotov and Komissarzhevsky together in order definitely to decide about the projected society.

When you want something very badly, you think your desire is both simple and feasible. And it seemed to us that it would be easy to realize our dream, to get the necessary money from club dues and donations. Like lava that streams down a mountain, our new idea, as it developed in our minds, embraced more and more tasks, more and more branches. Fedotov was the representative of the theatrical and literary world, Komissarzhevsky the representative of music and opera, Count Sollogub of the artists. Besides, our Society was joined by the publisher of the new journal *Artist*, which later was a big success. Its founders took advantage of the newly-born society, in order to popularize their venture. Besides, as the project was developed, it was decided to open dramatic and opera schools. Could we have got along without them now that we had two such marvellous teachers as Fedotov and Komissarzhevsky?

Everybody thought a great deal of our venture and prophesied success and only Count Sollogub tried to cool my ardour and warned me against impractical steps.

Fedotova asked me over several times in order to use her motherly influence and save me from impending disaster which she feared might befall me. But because of my persevering nature, which made me go stubbornly after what I had set my heart on, I would not heed their advice. Fedotova's pessimism, I thought, was due to her dissensions with her husband, and I did not believe in Sollogub's practical experience, for he was too much of an artiste to be practical. And then luck would have it that I unexpectedly received a big sum of money, somewhere between twenty-five and thirty thousand rubles. Not being accustomed to so much money, I considered myself a millionaire and gave a large part of it to the Society in order to get hold of certain premises which seemed to us to be more than necessary for its success. The building needed repairs badly, and since no one had any money for that, I again contributed, carried away by my enthusiasm.

Our Society of Art and Literature opened its doors at the end of 1888 in its well-furnished building in the centre of which there was a spacious auditorium that on occasion could also serve as a ball-room. Around the auditorium there was a foyer, and a large room for the artists. They painted the walls themselves and designed the furniture. In this quaint room they met and drew their sketches, which were auctioned on the spot at unofficial gatherings, the proceeds going to pay for the gala dinner.

Actors from every theatre in Moscow appeared on our stage, as readers or impromptu players; others thought up charades, danced, sang, and what amused all was that dramatic actors would appear as opera singers and ballet dancers, and ballet dancers would appear as dramatic actors.

The opening night attracted all the intellectuals of any import. They thanked the founders of the Society and me in particular for bringing actors, musicians, scientists and artists together under one roof, and assured us that they had waited long for a society like ours. The press greeted our opening enthusiastically. A few days after the gala opening the dramatic department of the Society staged its first production. And thereby hangs a tale.

FIRST SEASON

The Operation

IT HAD BEEN DECIDED as far back as spring to open our theatre with Pushkin's *Miser Knight* and Molière's *Georges Dandin.* I think that no amateurs could have made a more difficult choice, and I still wonder why we did it. For each of Pushkin's sentences is a theme for a work of art, or at least, for a whole act. To interpret a few pages of his creation is tantamount to playing several long dramas. This tragedy about avarice occupying just a few pages, covers *all* that has been or will ever be said of that human vice.

I was engaged in both plays: in the first I had the tragic title rôle, and in the second the comic part of Sottenville. Classic characters must be moulded like bronze monuments and that is too hard a job for an amateur and a beginner, for what he needs is thrilling plot and outward action, which will hold the spectator spellbound. In Pushkin, on the other hand, the outward plot is simple, and there is almost no outward action: it is all of an inner character.

A medieval baron descends of nights into the cellar where his riches are hidden, and gloats over his wealth. Each night he adds a handful of gold pieces, exulting over the price of each, now murder, now hungry death, now debauch, now corruption–all human virtues and faults, everything. People think he is poor, but he is rich, and all humankind is in his hands. He is all-powerful, he is above all desires, he despises everybody. And this power at his command is all the dearer to him because it is secret. His love of gold grows into a passion, and his consciousness of power into madness. Sitting amidst his open trunks, the candles gleaming and the gold glittering, he is intoxicated by the consciousness of his power. He overflows with bliss, but suddenly remembers that this bliss is not eternal, that death will deprive him of everything, and gives his treasure, amassed at the cost of sleepless nights, of pangs of conscience, of privations and hunger, to his worthless son, a spendthrift who will squander the riches with his friends. Oh, if he could only sit on his trunks after death as he does now, and protect his treasures from the hands of the living. These thoughts drive the miser mad and he shrieks in despair as the final curtain falls.

"Whom should I take for a model? Whom should I imitate? I have never seen anyone play this part, and I can't even imagine any actor in the rôle," I said to myself. "The only man who can save me is Fedotov. I will place myself in his hands."

"Tonight I will sleep, or rather, I will not sleep with you," Fedotov told me one day. "Arrange it so that we can pass the night in the same room, and lie opposite each other."

I did what he asked me.

Fedotov was already an old man, with a mop of thick gray hair, with bristly, cropped moustaches, which had grown used to the actor's razor, with a lively face and a tic. He had restless eyes. Asthma had bent his figure, but could not affect his superhuman energy. He was a chain smoker, and he only smoked thin, perfumed ladies' cigarettes.

In his night-shirt, his thin aged legs naked, Fedotov began to speak of the scenery, plans and *mise-en-scène* which he had decided upon for the tragedy. He described them enthusiastically and talentedly as only he could. He said that the *mise-en-scène* had been worked out, but I saw that he did not know himself how the thing would look in the end. He painted a vivid picture to fire me and himself with creative enthusiasm. I have done the same thing myself many times since then, and I know this old method of the *régisseur* very well indeed. It does not matter that things will be diametrically different from what you had imagined in the beginning. Often one does not believe that one can do on the stage what one dreams of. But even wild fancies are stimulating. Now and then I interrupted Fedotov with suggestions for his project. Then we threw everything to the winds, and began from the very beginning, in an altogether new way. But there were many snags, and we were forced to think up still another plan. In the end, our fantasies crystallized into something that was rich in content, and brief, like the Pushkin play itself. In his enthusiasm Fedotov would leap from his bed and demonstrate his ideas. His bent, aged figure, his thin, emaciated legs, his nervous face, and his vivid talent were already creating an outline of the barely discernible picture, which I also seemed to see. It was the picture of a weak, nervous old man, interesting in its inner and outer characteristics. But I dreamed of another, of a portrait of a man more monumental and collected in his vice, without any signs of nervousness, but, on the contrary, with tremendous self-control and unshakable belief in his rights. Fedotov was in reality searching for a similar image. His nervousness was only due to his exhaustion after a day's work.

But there was a difference: his hero was older and more characteristic than mine. He seemed to come from the paintings by old masters. Do you remember those typical faces of old men lit up by reddish candlelight, bending over swords that they are cleaning of bloodstains, or over a book? My image was another one; generally speaking, it was a noble opera father or an old man, like St. Brie in *Les Huguenots.* I was already beginning to imitate one of the well-known Italian baritones, who had well-shaped legs in black tights, wonderful slippers, wide breeches, a well-cut doublet, and a sword. The sword was the most important thing of all. It was the sword that had attracted me to the rôle. From that night there lived two entirely different images in my soul and they fought like two bears in the same den.

I spent many a torturing moment trying to decide which of the two images it was better to imitate, Fedotov's or the opera baritone's. In some respects I liked Fedotov's; there was no denying that his creation was talented and original. In others–and there were more of them–the baritone took the upper hand. How could I deny myself the well-shaped legs in tights, the high Spanish collar in a moment when I had at last got a beautiful medieval rôle, which I had missed playing and singing when I was a singer? It seemed to me at that time that to sing and to recite verse was the same thing. My adulterated taste seemed to confuse Fedotov. Feeling it in me, he lost his fire, grew silent, and snuffed out his candle.

Our second meeting and discussion took place when Count Sollogub demonstrated his sketches of the scenery and costumes.

"How awful!" I said to myself when I saw them.

Imagine a very old man with noble, aristocratic features in a dirty and ragged leather headpiece resembling a woman's bonnet, with a long, uncut imperial that looked like a full-grown beard, with thin, unkempt moustaches, in baggy, worn-out tights with awkward folds on the legs, long slippers that made his feet look thin and narrow, a well-worn, half-buttoned coarse shirt stuck into old breeches, which had seen better days, a waistcoat with wide sleeves like those of a monk. A well-defined, aged stoop. The whole figure—tall, thin, bent like a question-mark stooping over a trunk, gold pieces flowing into it through his thin, bony fingers.

"What! Play a pitiful beggar instead of my handsome baritone! Never!"

I could not hide my hurt feelings and began to beg tearfully to be released from the part, which had become hateful to me.

"I can't play it."

"But what do you want?" asked the confused artist and stage director.

I told them frankly what I had dreamed of, and what attracted me in the rôle. I tried to draw a picture of what I had imagined. I even showed the portrait of the baritone, which I always carried in my pocket.

To this day I cannot understand how there existed in me—simultaneously—the tastelessness of an opera singer and the sophistication of the French theatre and operetta, which had developed my taste as a stage director. It appears that at that period I was still a tasteless imitator.

Fedotov and Sollogub began performing an operation that was an amputation and leaching out all the theatrical artificiality that I had amassed in my amateur years. They taught me a lesson that I shall never forget. They laughed me down and showed me as clearly as two and two is four all the backwardness, inconsistency, and vulgarity of my taste at that time. At first I grew silent, then I became ashamed, and in the end I felt I was a nonentity. Something seemed to break in me. All that was old was no good, and there was nothing new. They had not persuaded me about the new, but they had certainly dissuaded about the old. They began gradually to impregnate me with the new by talking with me, showing me pictures of old and new masters, and instructing me in a masterly way. I felt like a capon that was being stuffed with nutritious nuts. I had to put the portrait of the baritone into a drawer for I had grown ashamed of my dream of being like him. Was that not success?

But I was still far from what my new teachers wanted me to be.

The next step of my work on the rôle was to learn to portray an old man outwardly, physically.

"It is easier for you to play a very old man than a middle-aged one," Fedotov explained to me. "In a very old man the contours are much clearer."

I was not altogether unprepared for playing old men. Practising before the mirror in our city house during the summer, I had portrayed everybody, old men included. Besides, I watched and imitated an old man I knew. I felt physically that the normal state of an old man resembled that of a young man who was exhausted after a long walk. The feet, hands and back became numb. Before standing up one must bend the body forward in order to shift the centre of gravity, to find a fulcrum, and to rise with the aid of the hands, for the legs half-refuse to serve. Once up, you do not straighten out the back at once, you unbend it gradually. You walk with small steps until you get into the swing of it, and begin to move swiftly only after a while, but then it is hard to stop. All this I understood not only theoretically, I felt it in practice when I was exhausted. It seemed good to me. And the better it seemed, the more I tried to put it into the part.

"No, this won't do. It is too much of a caricature. It's how children imitate old men," Fedotov criticized me. "You mustn't overdo it. Take it easier."

I tried to control myself, but was still overdoing it.

"Still easier!" he commanded.

I continued to tone down on my performance, until I no longer had to strain myself and could retain the rhythm of age only through inertia.

"Just right now," Fedotov commended.

I did not understand a thing. When I stopped imitating an old man, I was told that I did well. When I used the very methods that Fedotov himself had approved, he told me that they were not worth anything. This could only mean that they were not necessary. So I threw away the methods that I had worked out, and stopped playing, but Fedotov would cry, "Louder. We can't hear you!"

No matter how hard I tried, I could not understand the secret.

I kept working on the same part but without result. In the simple, quieter sequences, I felt something, but these were an actor's feelings and they had nothing to do with the image itself. I lived through something outwardly, i.e., physically, but that bore relation only to the age characteristics of the rôle. I learned to speak my lines simply, but that was not due to the inner motives of Pushkin's poem. I spoke just for the sake of speaking. One can imagine an exercise of the following order: pretend you limp, and while you limp put a room in order and sing a song at the same time. In the same way one may walk like an old man, perform the necessary stage business and mechanically declaim Pushkin's lines. That was apparently as much as I could do at the time, for just could not enter the part fully and was sick of it. I had treated the rôle as if it were a coat, that I put on in a hurry and missed one sleeve. I was hardly able to use half of what I had achieved in the quieter sequences. And in the strong places I could not handle even the little that I had discovered in the part. At such moments I would be visited by what I had once called inspiration, and I would begin forcing my voice, hissing, and straining my whole body and read the lines—and read them badly, provincially, with too much pathos and without any soul.

As the Baron in Pushkin's *The Miser Knight* (1888)

The rehearsals ended, and I went to Vichy and tortured myself all summer over the part, continuing to confuse myself more and more. I could think of nothing else. It plagued me and was becoming a sickening *idée fixe.* There is no worse human torture than the pangs of creation. You feel the *something* that is lacking in the part; it is very near, here in yourself, and all you have to do is to grasp it, but as soon as you stretch your hand it is gone. After this, with an empty soul, without any inspiration, you approach a strong place in the rôle—it is only necessary to open the gates of your soul—but there seem to be buffers sticking out of the soul and they do not let you approach strong emotion. The whole thing is reminiscent of a bather who cannot make up his mind to dive into icy water.

In my quest for a solution I decided on a means which then seemed to me a stroke of genius. A few miles from Vichy there is a medieval castle with a huge dungeon.

"Let them lock me up in there for several hours," I told myself, "and there, in that true ancient tower, alone, I may find that feeling, that condition or that emotion." I didn't know then *what* it was I needed and *what* I was looking for.

I went to the castle and got them to lock me up in the cellar for two hours. It was creepy and lonely; it was dark and damp; there were rats, and all these inconveniences only interfered with my concentrating on the rôle. And when I began to repeat in the darkness the hated lines, the whole thing grew foolish. Then I felt cold and began to fear that I might finish with pneumonia. This fear did away with all thought of studying the rôle. I began to knock but no one came. I became really frightened, but my fear had nothing to do with my rôle.

The only result of the experiment was a bad cold and even greater despair than before. Apparently, to become a tragedian it was not enough to lock oneself in a cellar with rats. Something else was necessary. But what? It seemed that one had to take oneself high into the clouds. But how was one to get there? No one would tell me. The stage directors could explain talentedly only *what they wanted.* They were interested only in the result. They criticized and told you *what they did not want,* but they would not tell you *how* to get at what was desired.

"Live the thing through, feel it more strongly, deeply, live it," they would say. Or, "You are not living it through. You must live it through. Try to feel it."

And I would try, with all my strength, and force my voice till I grew hoarse, and blood would rush to my head, and my eyes would pop out of their sockets, and still I would go on trying and trying to do what was required of me until I became exhausted. One rehearsal would tire me so that

I would not have the strength to repeat the scene again when asked by the stage director.

If this occurred at ordinary rehearsals, what would happen at the performance when I would be too worried to control myself? And to say the truth, my acting on the first night was entirely built on exaggerated inner tension.

But–the production was successful. Wonderful scenery, costumes designed by that talented artist Count Sollogub, remarkable *mises-en-scène*, the whole tone and atmosphere of the performance, its fine balance–due to Fedotov–all was new and original at that time. There were curtain calls. Who was to take them but I? And I took them, and the public applauded me, because it does not know the difference between the work of the artist and the work of the stage director, and between the work of the stage director and the work of the actor. Nevertheless there was praise for me. I believed it and sincerely thought that if there was praise, then the work I did must have reached the public, must have made an impression, must have been good, and that tension, these convulsions were genuine inspiration. All in all, I had felt my rôle truly and everything was right.

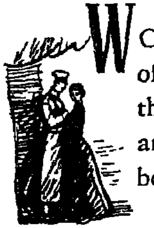
But the stage director scolded me. Out of jealousy! If he is jealous, there must be something for him to envy.

There is no escaping this vicious circle of self-deceit. The actor is caught in the quicksands of flattery and praise. Pleasant things always win out because one wants to believe them. One likes to listen to the compliments of charming lady admirers and not to the bitter truth of an expert.

Young actors, beware of your lady admirers! You may pay them court, but do not talk with them of art. Learn, from your very first steps, to listen to, understand and love the bitter truth about yourselves. Find out who can tell you that truth. Talk of your art only with them. And let them scold you to their heart's content.

A HAPPY ACCIDENT

Georges Dandin



WORK ON THE OTHER RÔLE for the same performance, that of Sottenville in *Georges Dandin,* was also far from easy. But then the hardest thing is to begin. And the greater the work of art, the more amazed you stand before it, like a pedestrian before Mont Blanc.

Molière also wrote of human passions and vice. He wrote of what he saw and knew. But, being a genius, he knew *everything.* His Tartuffe was not just a certain M. Tartuffe, but all the human Tartuffes taken together. He described life, events, an individual, and the result was human vice or passion. In this respect he was close to Pushkin and to all great writers –and in this sense they are all akin. And they are great precisely because they are people of a wide diapason.

Pushkin, Gogol, Molière, and other great writers have long been garbed in all kinds of traditions, which make it almost impossible to get to the core of their works. The works of Shakespeare, Schiller and Pushkin are called by actors and theatre workers *Gothic* pieces; the works of Molière are called *Molière* pieces. The very existence of the designation and the grouping of these writers in one category hint at their being all of the same cut. If the drama is in verse, if there are medieval costumes and pathos–that is if it is romantic, if it has Gothic scenery and costumes then it is a *Gothic* play.

The blame for creating such prejudices and misrepresenting great masterpieces through false traditions does not lie only with actors and the theatres; even more to blame are the teachers who poison the charm of the child's first acquaintance with a work of genius when his sense of perception is fresh and strong, his intuition powerful, and his memory impressible. They speak of the Great in one general, dry, old and uninteresting tone of pedantry.

And how are *classical, Gothic* dramas performed? Who does not know that? Any schoolboy will show you how lofty feelings are interpreted in the theatre, how much pathos is put into declaiming and chanting verses, how costumes are worn, how pompously actors behave on the stage and what striking poses they assume. The gist of the matter does not lie in the author and his style, but in Spanish boots, tights, swords, scanning the verses, the voice badly and falsely placed, the bearing of the actor, his animal temperament, beautiful thighs, curled hair, shadowed eyes.

The same thing applies to Molière. Who does not know the dressing of Molière? It is the same for all his plays and for all plays like his. Think of any of his plays you have seen and you will at once remember all the productions of his plays, in all theatres. You will visualize all the theatrical Orgons, Cleanders, Clotildes and Sganarelles who are as like one another as peas in a pod. And this is the holy tradition so sedulously guarded by all theatres!

And where is Molière? He cannot be seen for the traditions. But if you read his one-act *L'impromptu de Versailles* you will see that Molière himself bitterly condemns all that goes into the making of the so-called Molière traditions. What can be more boresome than the Molière traditions on the stage, this Molière *as always*, Molière *the Conventional*, Molière *in general*!

This concept "in general" is the bane of the theatre. It stood between me and Molière's Sottenville like a stone wall. Not seeing the real Molière because of that wall, I told myself at the very first rehearsal that I knew everything. It was not for nothing that I had seen Molière on the French scene. True, I had never seen *Dandin* on the stage, but that did not trouble me. I had Molière "in general" before me, and that was more than enough for me, for a born imitator.

At the first rehearsals I was already copying all of the Molière tricks I had seen, and feeling thoroughly at home.

"You must have seen a lot in Paris," Fedotov said, smiling. "You have Molière at your finger-tips, I see."

Fedotov knew how to surmount the wall that lay between an actor and his rôle, and how to rip off the dressing of false tradition and replace it with the true traditions of real art. He would mount the stage himself and play, creating what was true and lifelike, and so destroying all that was false and dead.

As Sottenville in Molière's *Georges Dandin* (1888)

Of course, this is not the best way of teaching actors, for it leads to imitation. But Fedotov looked at it in a simple and more practical way.

"What else can I do with these amateurs," he would justify himself, "but show them myself how to act if we want this performance to be ready in time! I cannot open classes to teach them, can I? They'll start by imitating and finish by entering into their parts."

Fedotov played the plot, but the plot is thoroughly connected with psychology, and psychology with the image and the playwright. The comedy element of the play, its satire, reveal themselves if one treats all that happens seriously and with great faith. And here Fedotov was very strong. Moreover, like all true Russian comedians, he created bright and rich character rôles. In other words, he had all that was necessary for Molière. It was not for nothing that during the flowering of the Russian theatre it was thought that among the world's best Molière actors were the Russians Shchepkin, Shumsky, Sadovsky and Jivokini. Besides, Fedotov had studied every subtlety of the French theatre, and this gave his acting a finish, a delicacy and a lightness all its own. Fedotov would play a part, and his playing would make the part clear; the organic nature of the part would show itself in all its beauty.

How wonderful and how simple! All one had to do was to get on the stage and do the same. But as soon as I felt the boards under me, everything would turn topsyturvy. It is a far cry between seeing a thing done and doing it yourself. You went on to the stage and all that seemed to be so easy while you were in the auditorium became devilishly hard. The hardest thing of all is to stand on the boards and to believe and take seriously all that takes place on the stage. Without faith and seriousness it is impossible to play satire or comedy, especially if it is French, especially if it is a classic, especially if it is Molière. The gist here is sincerely to believe in one's foolish, or impossible, or helpless position, to become sincerely excited and to suffer sincerely. One can *make-believe* one is serious, but then the comedy avenges itself. To live over, or to make-believe one is living over–there is a difference between these two as great as the difference between natural, organic comism, and the antics of a talentless jester.

I played artlessly at living where Fedotov lived organically. I tried to look as if I was in real earnest and really believed in what was happening to me on the stage. Fedotov presented real, living life; I had only a report of that life. But what Fedotov showed was so beautiful that it was impossible not to benefit by it. I was a captive in his hands–the usual result when a stage master prompts the apprentice to imitate him. True, the wall of false traditions was breaking, but instead of it there rose between me and the rôle Fedotov's image. I had to surmount this obstacle now in order to incarnate my Sottenville. It was difficult. But nevertheless, a living image, although alien, is much better than the dead Molière tradition.

But when Fedotov noticed the slightest glimmer of independence in an actor's creative work, he was as happy as a child and did everything he could to help the actor find himself.

And so I again began to imitate Fedotov. Of course I copied him only outwardly, for it is impossible to copy the living spark of genius. The trouble was that I, an inveterate imitator, was at the same time a very bad imitator. Imitation is a special gift, and I did not possess it. When my imitation was unsuccessful, I dropped it and returned to my old methods of play, seeking life now in the tempo of my acting, with hollow patter and much waving of arms, now in acting without a pause so that the spectator might not have time to be bored, now in straining all my muscles and squeezing out temperament, now in rushing through the lines. In a word, I was returning to my former amateur and musical comedy mistakes, which can be summed up in one sentence:

"Play as hard as you can so that your audience does not fall asleep."

"They praised me for it before," I told myself. "I was gay and light and funny on the stage."

But my attempts to commit my former errors were not acceptable to Fedotov. He would shout from behind his stage director's desk:

"Don't mumble! Clearer! Do you think that this will make me, the spectator, laugh? Just the opposite; you bore me because I don't understand anything. Your stamping, and waving your arms, and walking, and all your numberless gestures interfere with my vision. There are spots in my eyes and a din in my ears. Whatever made you think it was funny?"

We were rapidly approaching the dress rehearsal and I was still, so to say, sitting between two chairs. But luckily for me, I received "a gift from Apollo." There was a streak in my make-up that gave a lively and comic expression to my face, and something suddenly turned within me. All that was vague became clear, all that was groundless acquired ground, all that I did not believe became believable. How to explain this inexplicable, sudden and magical creative phenomenon? Something had been ripening within me, slowly filling with life while it was in the bud, and now at last it bloomed. One accidental touch–and the bud burst open and its fresh young petals were seeking the warmth of the sun. And with me, an accidental stroke of the make-up brush on my face helped to open the flower of the rôle in the shining glow of the footlights. This was a moment of supreme joy that repaid for all my former pangs of creation. What can I compare it with? With a return to life after dangerous illness, or with the successful termination of birth pangs. How good it is to be an actor in such moments, and how rare these moments are among actors. They are like a bright guiding star that points a way to further artistic quest and success.

Looking back and analyzing the results of that performance, I realize the importance of the moment I had lived through then. Thanks to Fedotov and Sollogub, I found the way out of my blind alley, where I had struggled for such a long time. I did not find a new path, but I came to understand my former mistakes, and that was already much. For instance, I had mistaken stage emotion, which is only a kind of hysteria, for true inspiration. After this performance my mistake was clear to me.

RESTRAINT

Bitter Fate

SOON AFTER the *Miser Knight* we produced *Bitter Fate* by Pisemsky, a play of peasant and land-gentry life. I played the part of the peasant Anany Yakovlev who goes to work to St. Petersburg. Meanwhile his wife Lizaveta falls in love with a neighbouring landlord, a good but weak-willed man, and gives birth to a child whom the squire wants to adopt. He also wants to take Lizaveta into his house. Anany returns unexpectedly to the village and learns everything. With great dignity he talks with the landlord and turns down his request. When the village elders nevertheless decide to take the child forcibly from him and come for it, Anany, in a fit of anger and despair, axes the child to death. He is sentenced to imprisonment in Siberia and the play ends with his going there to expiate his sin.

The play is masterfully written. After Tolstoi's *Power of Darkness,* it is the best drama about our peasants.

The rôle of Anany is at times not only dramatic, but tragic. The parts were well taken care of by our amateurs, and some, especially that of Lizaveta, were exceptionally well played.

Just as before, I set myself a new problem to solve: to develop scenic *restraint.* I had come to realize that in moments of strong animation which I mistook for inspiration, it was not I who controlled my body, that it was my body that controlled me. But what can the body do when creative emotion is required? In such moments the body becomes strained with impotence and tied up in knots, or there appear spasms that petrify the legs and arms, shorten the breath, and tie all the organs. Or just the opposite, due to emotional impotence, the entire body becomes subject to anarchy, the muscles move against one's will, causing innumerable movements, meaningless gestures and poses, tic, and so on. This chaos often drives emotion back into its secret recesses. Is it possible to create or think in such circumstances? Obviously, the first thing is to overcome these circumstances in oneself, that is, to destroy the anarchy, free the body from the power of the muscles and put it into the hands of emotion.

At that time I understood the word *restraint* only in its outward sense, and therefore tried to do away with every unnecessary gesture and movement, that is, I taught myself to stand motionlessly on the stage. It is far from easy to do that before more than two thousand eyes. I was successful, but only at the cost of tremendous bodily strain. I ordered my body not to move and stood like a totem pole. Little by little, from one rehearsal to another, from one performance to another, I untied the knots of the muscular spasms which were strewn in all the corners of my body. I transformed general strain into a particular and local strain, that is, I concentrated the strain of my whole body in one given spot: in the fingers, the toes, the diaphragm or rather what I took at that time to be the diaphragm. Clenching my fists with all my strength, I dug the nails of my fingers into the palms of the hands, often leaving bloody marks. I drew together the toes of my feet and pressed them with all the weight of my body into the floor, often leaving blood in my shoes as a result. Creating local and particular strain, I removed the general strain from the rest of my body, giving it a chance to stand free without any unnecessary movements. Subsequently I learned to wrestle with local strain in the hands, the feet and so on. But it took a long time before I succeeded. As soon as I freed the strain in my fists it would spread all over the rest of my body. In order to get rid of these spasms it was necessary to gather them once more into my fists. This was a vicious circle. But when I did free myself of tension, I felt a great artistic joy, and the stage director shouted: "Good! Simple! Natural!"

Unfortunately these moments were rare, accidental, and brief.

And another discovery. The calmer and more restrained my body felt on the stage, the more I deemed it necessary to supplant gesture with mimetics, intonation of the voice, and look. How happy I was in those moments! It seemed to me that I had finally understood everything, that I could make full use of my discovery. And I would give full rein to mimetics, to the eyes, to the voice, only to hear the stage director shout:

"Don't grimace!" or "Don't shout!"

And I would again find myself in a blind alley.

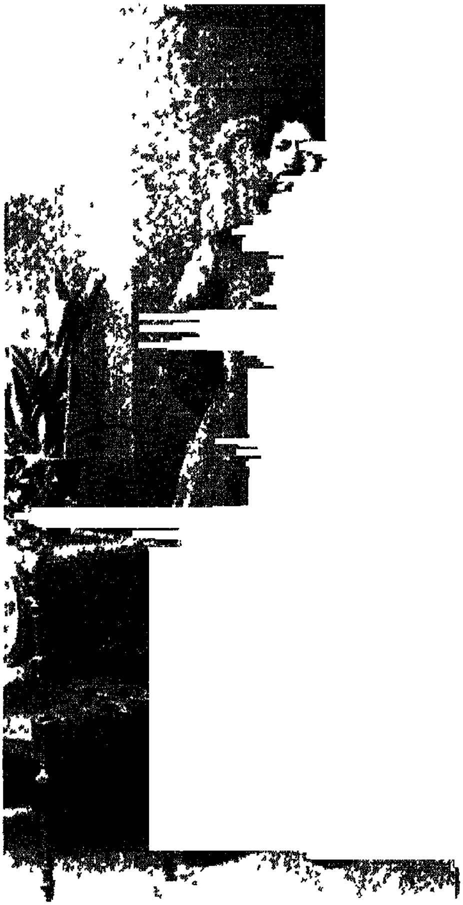
"Something's wrong again. Why do I feel that I am right, and they feel that I am wrong?" I asked myself. And once again I would be in doubt, something inside me would ache, I would lose what I had discovered, and my muscles would fall back into anarchy.

"What's the trouble?" I tried to find out.

"What's the trouble? The trouble is that you are grimacing."

"Does that mean that I am not to use any mimetics?"

And I tried not only to rely on mimetics sparingly but even to dispense with it. The stage director seemed satisfied, but I noticed something myself. In the scene of explanation with the landlord I only had to try to appear quiet and indifferent, and emotion would at once surge within me. I had to conceal this, but the more I concealed it, the more it surged. And again I felt warm and at home on the stage. Concealing emotion only stimulates it. But why was the stage director quiet?



As Anany Yakovlev in Pisemsky's *Bitter Fate* (1888)

I was not satisfied with the praise showered on me from all quarters when I finished the act. It would have been much more important to be praised by the stage director when I felt inwardly satisfied. But the stage directors did not, it seemed, recognize the importance of that yet.

This is what happened in the quiet parts of the rôle. But in the mass scene, which was magnificently written by the author, magnificently produced by Fedotov and magnificently played by the actors–in this scene I could not play indifferently. I surrendered to the general atmosphere of excitement and could do nothing with myself. No matter how much I strained in order to control my gestures, in the end my temperament overcame my consciousness and my artificial restraint, and I lost all control of myself to such a degree that after the performance I could not remember what I had done on the stage. Perspiring with excitement, I walked across the hall to the stage director's table in order to share my troubles with him.

"I know, I know," I began, "you will tell me that I gestured too much. But it was more than I could do to restrain them. Look, I have scratched my palms with my finger-nails."

To my surprise, I was congratulated.

"Fine! You made a wonderful impression! What restraint! Play like this on the first night, and nothing more is necessary."

"But at the end I let go my gestures, I couldn't control myself."

"That is what was good."

"Good that I let go my gestures?"

"Yes. What's the use of gestures when a man is not himself?" I was told. "The good part of it was that we saw how you were controlling yourself more and more, until at last something broke in you, and you could no longer do so. This is what is called growth, *crescendo,* passing from *piano* to *forte.* Emotion rose from the lowest to the highest notes, from calmness to madness. This is what you must remember. Control yourself while you have strength to do so–the longer, the better. Let the gradual rise to the top be long, and the last blow short, otherwise it will lose its effect. Mediocre actors usually do the very opposite. They leave out the most interesting gradual growth of emotion and leap directly from *piano* to *fortissimo,* where they remain for a long time."

"Ah, so that is the secret?" I thought. "That is something from the region of practical advice which is so necessary to the actor. This is my first stage baggage."

There was joy all around me–the best evidence of one's impression. I asked everybody I could, not to satisfy my actor's vanity, but to make sure that there was some connection between what I had felt on the stage and what they had felt in the auditorium. Now I know something about this striking difference.

This time, too, as in the rôle of Sottenville, the make-up reminded me of a familiar peasant's face; it was not something alien but accorded with my emotions. Having found the necessary image, I rode my hobby horse again and began to imitate. But it is much better to imitate an image created by yourself than another's methods of play or another's mannerisms.

The performance was a great success. The play, the production and the actors were lauded by the press and by the public. The play remained in repertoire, and the more I played in it, the more I felt myself at home on the stage. I conveyed most of my feelings to the spectators, and I was happy with my success, and with the fact that I had discovered the secret which might guide me, and on which I might depend in my further work on the stage.

TWO STEPS BACKWARDS

The Stone Guest and *Villainy and Love*

I TOOK ADVANTAGE of my new "restraint" methods of play for but a short time. I only had to hear Pushkin's verse in *The Stone Guest,* in which I first played Don Carlos and then Don Juan, I only had to put on Spanish boots and a sword, and all that I had achieved with such difficulty gave way to the powerful pernicious habits I had learned in my many years of amateur acting. To yield to old habits is like resuming smoking. The organism absorbs old experiences with added strength. It got along without them temporarily, but it never stopped dreaming of tobacco.

In this manner I advanced in art a step at a time and retreated two steps. Why did I grab at parts for which I was not yet ready? The greatest obstacle in the artistic development of an actor is haste, the forcing of his immature powers, the eternal desire to play leading parts and tragic heroes. To work weak emotions is worse than singing Wagnerian rôles with an immature voice. For the actor's nervous and subconscious apparatus is much tenderer and more

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Don Juan and Alexander Fedotov as Leporello in Pushkin's *The Stone Guest* (1889)

complex and more easily spoiled and more difficult to fix than the vocal apparatus of a singer. But apparently man is so created that he dreams of what he has not and what he must not have; a boy is eager to smoke and curl wicked moustaches; a girl wants to flirt instead of playing with dolls and studying; a youth wants to make himself look older and sophisticated in order to arouse interest in himself. Out of jealousy, conceit, foolishness, and inexperience, each desires to be what he cannot or must not be. A beginner on the stage wants to play Hamlet, a rôle which should be played only when an actor is mature. He does not understand that his hurry forces and destroys his tender spiritual apparatus. But no matter how many times you say this to a pupil or a young actor, it will be in vain. Let a pretty high-school girl applaud the young actor, let another praise him, let a third ask him for an autograph, and all the advice wise men give him evaporates before his conceit.

I played Spaniards, ordered my top-boots in Paris, and overtaxed my immature acting abilities just to get praised by high-school girls.

The worst thing of all was that I was compelled to take over the part of Don Juan, as the actor who played him was forced to give it up after the very first performance. That tickled my vanity.

"When I asked for the rôle, they would not give it to me, but now when there is no one to play it, they come to me themselves. So, they have finally appreciated me!" I thought triumphantly, and conceitedly.

I accepted the rôle condescendingly, although inwardly I was flattered by the fact that they could not get along without me.

The performance was well received. I was applauded because high-school girls cannot discern the actor from the part, and I went ahead like a fool, repeating all my old mistakes. They became even more pronounced because now I could act with restraint, which I learned playing Anany. Restraint on the stage underlines all of one's merits and demerits and the fact that I had learned to reveal emotion in strong places was bad in my new rôle. The more I opened up, the more false theatrical pathos there was in my acting, for my soul had nothing to give to the part. Again I imitated the baritone in Parisian top-boots, with a bejewelled sword at his belt. I decided that I had learned the secret of portraying not only simple peasants but also tragic Spanish lovers, and no one could dissuade me of it.

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Ferdinand and Maria Lilina as Louise in Schiller's *Villainy and Love* (1889)

My work on Don Carlos and Don Juan only retarded my development.

Unfortunately, my next rôle that season though not Spanish or in verse, nevertheless called for top-boots, a sword, love speeches, and high style. I played the part of Ferdinand in Schiller's tragedy *Villainy and Love.* But there was a *but* which to a certain degree saved me from new mistakes and without which we could never have coped with the play.

Louise was played by Maria Lilina (her real name was Perevozchikova), who defied society's opinion to go on the stage. We fell in love with each other without realizing it. It was our public who opened our eyes: our kisses were too natural and what we ourselves did not know was an open secret to all. In this performance I displayed less technique than intuition, but it was not hard to guess who inspired us, Apollo or Hymen.

The engagement was announced in the spring, at the end of the Society's first season, and on July 5 we were married. Then we went on a honeymoon and returned in the autumn with the news that my wife could not fulfil her engagement in the theatre during the following season.

In this manner *Villainy and Love* proved to be not only a drama of love, but a villainous drama, too. It was performed only two or three times, and then removed from the repertoire. Could we, after the marriage, as man and wife, still display that same artistic technique and inspiration that we displayed before our engagement? Or would the rôle of Ferdinand, if repeated, degrade to the level of Don Juan and Don Carlos, and serve as a reprimand to my obstinacy?

Just as in former performances, Fedotov made expert use of the passable artistic material he had at his disposal. We gladly listened to the counsel of our experienced director. It helped us, but we did not understand it consciously, and these performances did little to improve our acting technique. The play was successful and I felt elated, for it proved all my theories about romantic rôles which I came to like even more after Don Juan.

"So I can play tragic rôles after all," I said to myself. "So I can play lovers, and the technical principles I found in *Bitter Fate* are really effective in tragedy!"

There is one noteworthy event that took place at the time that I should like to mention. To reinforce the financial position of our Society, we arranged a masquerade with a programme at one of the most popular clubs in Moscow. The job of decorating the hall was entrusted to the best artists, while the entertainment part was in the hands of our actors. Especially successful was the amateur gypsy choir composed of the pupils and players of our Society, with Komissarzhevsky's two daughters, who came for the occasion from St. Petersburg, as soloists. They had wonderful voices and their father's fine style of singing. The masquerade marked the first real début of Vera Komissarzhevskaya, who later became very well known.

WHEN YOU ACT AN EVIL MAN, LOOK TO SEE WHERE HE IS GOOD

The Usurpers of the Law

THE SOCIETY was a financial flop in its first year, but that did not shake our faith in its eventual success.

By the beginning of the second season there had occurred considerable changes. The rivalry of the Society's drama and opera schools and their directors–Fedotov and Komissarzhevsky–gave rise to disagreements, and materially their whole weight fell on my shoulders. Moreover, the family *soirées* had become boring.

The actors said, "We are tired of playing in the theatre."

"We are tired of painting at home," the artists chimed in. "We would rather play cards in the evenings, and there are no card games here. What kind of a club is this, anyway?"

The artists did not want to paint without cards, the dancers to dance, the singers to sing. The disintegration of the club was speeded up by a conflict after which the artists left the Society, followed by many actors. There remained the dramatic department and with it the opera-drama school.

The second season of the Society of Art and Literature (1889-90) opened with the production of *The Usurpers of the Law* by Pisemsky. I played the part of a general of the times of Emperor Paul I. Both the play and the part are written skilfully but in the difficult language of the epoch. General Imshin goes to war leaving his young wife–the daughter of a ruined nobleman–to the care of his Don Juanish brother, Prince Sergei. The young woman loves a handsome officer of the guards and when Prince Sergei accidentally finds that out he decides to threaten her with exposure unless she gives herself to him.

But the general seems to have sensed the danger. He returns home unexpectedly, walks unseen into the library through the garden, and learns everything, both the treachery of his brother and the faithlessness of his wife. The young officer comes to see his beloved and is confronted by the old husband. This scene, in which the general plays with the lovers like a cat with a mouse, is extremely powerful. He locks them up in a cellar and there, with a jester as presiding judge, the general conducts court, sentencing the lovers to life imprisonment. For days on end the general sits at the window of the lovers' prison, torn by pity and jealousy.

Meanwhile, her father, a drunken officer with the face of the great Russian general Suvorov, rallies his followers and attacks the estate in order to free his daughter. There is a real battle on the stage. The attackers climb over the fence, break into the cellar and free the prisoners. The general quickly organizes his domestic and counter-attacks. The assailants retreat, but Imshin is mortally wounded. Before dying he gives his wife to Rykov, the young officer. The play, a real tragedy in the beginning, deteriorates into a melodrama towards the end.

Much of what I had discovered before I used in this new part: *restraint,* the *concealing* of my inner jealousy under the mask of outer calm, which so fired the temperament in the rôle of Anany, *mimetics* and the *play of the eyes* (a thing that comes of itself when the anarchy of the muscles is done away with), the full spiritual *revelation* of the soul in moments of high stress, and my *old-man* methods from *The Miser Knight*. True, in the rôle there were dangerous reefs, such as top-boots, sword, words and feelings of love, and if not verse, still the pompous language of the epoch, but Imshin is too much Russian to be afraid of the Spaniard in me. And his love is not young, but old and more characteristic than romantic in outline.

People said that I had created an image despite myself, but I did not know how. My acting technique pushed me on to truth, and truth is the best stimulant of emotion, incarnation, imagination and creativeness. It was the first time I did not have to imitate anyone, and I felt good on the stage.

There was only one unpleasant thing–the public complained about the play. "It is too heavy!" they said.

There was good reason for that, which I discovered in the following manner.

Rehearsals of *The Usurpers of the Law* coincided with those of another play in which I did not take part but which I went to watch in my spare time. Sometimes my opinion was asked. Good and true words come not when you want to say them, but when you do not think of them, when they become necessary themselves. For instance, I cannot philosophize and think and create aphorisms when I am alone. But when I have to explain my thoughts to another, then logic is necessary to my arguments, and aphorisms come of themselves. And that is what happened this time too. What is done on the stage is better seen from the auditorium than from the stage itself. Looking from the auditorium I at once saw the mistakes on the stage, and began to explain them to my comrades.

"Look here," I said to one of them, "you are playing a hypochondriac. You whimper all the time, and you are worried, it seems, that you might not look like a hypochondriac. But why worry about it, when the author himself has already taken care of it? The result is that you are painting the picture in only one colour, and black becomes black only when some white is introduced for the sake of contrast. So inject a bit of white colour as well as some other colours of the rainbow into your rôle. There will be contrast, variety, and truth. So when you play a hypochondriac, seek where he is happy and cheerful. If after this you continue your whimpering, it will no longer be boring. On the contrary, its strength will be redoubled. Continuous, non-stop whimpering like yours is just as unbearable as a toothache. When you act a good man, look to see where he is evil, and in an evil man, look to see where he is good."

Having accidentally uttered this aphorism, I realized that there was nothing vague about the rôle of General Imshin. I had made the same mistake as my comrade. I played a beast, but there was no necessity to take care of that, the author himself had taken more than sufficient care of it; what was left to me was to look and see where he was good, suffering, remorseful, loving, tender and sacrificing. And this was new baggage in my actor's train.

When you act an evil man, look to see where he is good.

When you play an old man, look to see where he is young. When you play a young man, look to see where he is old, etc.

The more I took advantage of this new discovery, the softer became the general tone of *The Usurpers of the Law*, the fewer complaints about its heaviness.

All throughout the second season, the Society of Art and Literature pursued the line of almost the same artistic quest and technical problems as in the first.

It was a pity that Fedotov did not put the same old vim into his work. He was dissatisfied with something; he did not get along with Komissarzhevsky and lost interest in our theatre.

CHARACTERIZATION

The Dowerless Bride, The Ruble

DURING THE SECOND YEAR I played several character parts, including Paratov in *The Dowerless Bride.*

Here is the story. In a small trading town on the Volga there live merchants, civilized outwardly and beasts at heart. Then there is the beautiful Larissa, for whom guitars and gypsy songs are almost everything. She has a tender soul and dreams of true love. Her mother, an ex-courtesan, wants to sell her daughter as dearly as possible, "to find a good setting for her jewel." Larissa, however, is hopelessly in love with a man who is far away. Desperate, she decides to marry a narrow-minded official, called Karandyshev. Her mother is in despair.

Meanwhile, down the Volga in his own steamer comes Paratov, an ex-guardsman turned shipowner, a brave, powerfully built, and handsome man. He wears a white guardsman's cap with a bright red band, a tight-fitting jacket of that period, an artistic bow tie; his shapely legs are ensconced in riding-breeches and high lacquered boots; a military coat is carelessly thrown over his shoulders like a Spanish cloak. In his hand is a horsewhip which he knows how to use on men also. His arrival is an event. The town is excited. The gypsies gather at the pier to meet him and the local rich go there to welcome him. The restaurant is preparing a banquet.

As Paratov in Ostrovsky's *The Dowerless Bride* (1894)

Paratov visits Larissa and learns of her forthcoming wedding. His ego hurt, he decides to revenge himself on his rival. To do that he attends the engagement dinner, gets her fiancé drunk, makes a laughing-stock out of him, and takes the girl for a boat ride on the Volga, complete with a gypsy chorus. Believing that Paratov will marry her Larissa gives herself to him, but at the end of the ride Paratov shows her his wedding-ring. Larissa realizes that she has been dishonoured and wants to drown herself, but hesitates. She is saved by her fiancé, sober and out to revenge himself on Paratov. In his excitement, he pulls the trigger of his revolver and kills Larissa. She dies, listening to the gypsy song, that comes from the restaurant where Paratov is feasting.

In my rôle there were many words of love, top-boots and a coat like a Spanish cloak—all dangerous reefs for me. Inwardly I was preparing for a duel between my former "opera baritone" methods and my newly-acquired technical methods of approach. Again I resorted to their help, that is, to the help of restraint, to concealing my emotions, to facial play, to the use of a variety of colours, in a word, to all that I had previously discovered. This created a fine feeling in which I began to believe. Imagination had free play, details began to appear as of themselves; for instance, the habits and characteristic traits of Paratov himself, like his military bearing and his devil-may-care attitude. With all this baggage I no longer felt empty on the stage; I had something to do on it, I did not feel myself undressed. As rehearsals progressed I became used to the technical approaches, and the sweep that is so characteristic of the Russian in Paratov opened my soul. On top of all that, I had a rather typical make-up. I saw Paratov's outer image, and everything became orderly. In this way, I first created my image artificially and then intuitively. It had a basis, and to a certain degree was justified, and all that remained was to copy, and the habit of doing that was still in me.

But there was one unpleasant thing in the rôle: I could not master the text. Notwithstanding Ostrovsky's marvellous language, in which one cannot change a single word, the text, as actors say, "did not take to my tongue." I always feared I might make a mistake. This made me nervous, frightened me, and caused stoppages and unnecessary pauses, creating confusion which deprived the play and the part of the necessary comedy lightness and momentum. The fear of the text was so great that every pause made me sweat. Once I mixed up my text so badly that I lost all self-control and did not even know how to find my way out of the labyrinth of words. I left the stage in confusion, spoiling one of the best places in the rôle of another actor.

This stage fright, born on that occasion, revealed itself in other rôles too and deprived me of my growing self-confidence. When I did not think of this new phenomenon of mine it would disappear. That proved it was of purely nervous origin. And here is further evidence of the correctness of such a hypothesis. One day, when we were performing *The Dowerless Bride,* I fell seriously ill. The temperature ran so high I was almost semi-conscious. But in order to show an example of discipline to my comrades, I came to the theatre in very cold weather, taking all the necessary precautions. They made me up while I lay on a couch, and, since I did not have to change my costume during the play, I was able to lie down in the intermissions and whenever I was not needed on the stage. The other actors were afraid that I would leave the theatre during the performance but, though distracted by my illness, I played confidently and freely. I had no reason to complain of either the text or of my memory.

Work on the rôle of Paratov and its results were of great educational value to me in the sense that they pointed clearly to my real calling in the theatre. I am a character actor. Because of that I had been able to by-pass all the hidden reefs of the rôle: its coat à la Spanish cloak, its top-boots, its love speeches and all the other temptations in it that were so dangerous to me.

But had I dispensed with characterization and tried to adapt the rôle to myself, to my own human peculiarities, failure would have been inevitable.

Why?

There are actors, mostly *jeunes premiers* and heroes, who are in love with themselves, who always and everywhere show not images, but themselves, their personalities, deliberately never changing themselves. An actor of that kind does not see the stage or the rôle unless he himself is concerned. They need Hamlet and Romeo as much as a fashion-minded girl needs a new dress. Such actors have good reason to fear stepping out of themselves, for their entire force lies in the charm of their scenic personality. When they attempt characterization, they lose all they have.

On the other hand, there are actors who are ashamed to show themselves. When they play a good or a kind man, they deem it immodest to claim those good qualities as their own. Playing evil, debauched or dishonest men, they are ashamed of making their own the qualities their portrayal calls for. But, having masked themselves, they are no longer afraid to show their faults and their virtues and can speak and say what they would never dare do in their own person and without a mask.

I belong to the actors of this second type. I am a character actor. More, I hold that all actors must be character actors, of course not in the sense of outer, but of inner characteristics. But even outwardly it is best for the actor occasionally to step out of himself. This, naturally, does not mean that he must lose his individuality and personality; it means that in each rôle he must find his individuality and personality, and yet be different. Why are all lovers handsome and curly-haired? Is it that young men who are not handsome have no right to love? Yet, in my life I only once saw a lover who was not afraid to make himself ugly in order that he might the better show his pure, loving heart–just as the ill-smelling coat of the drainman Akim in *The Power of Darkness* stresses his crystal-pure soul. But in those days what I loved was not the rôle, but myself in the rôle. That is why I was not interested in my success as an actor, but in my personal success, and turned the stage into a show-window for myself.

It is only natural that this error took me farther and farther away from creative tasks and art.

In the play I am now describing I began to realize that my scenic personality was not in my individuality, but in the character images I was creating, in my artistry. That was a very important discovery. But at that time I was not altogether conscious of it.

My next appearance was as the stockbroker Obnovlensky in *The Ruble,* by Fedotov. I forgot what the play was about. Like in the case of Sottenville, after long tortures this rôle became successful thanks to an accidental touch in my make-up. The wig-maker, in his hurry, had glued the left half of my moustache lower than the right. This gave my face an expression of slyness. To help the moustaches along, I drew the right brow higher than the left. The result was a face that enabled me simply to repeat the text of my speeches and everybody understood at once that Obnovlensky was a scoundrel, not a single one of whose words could be believed.

This character rôle was also successful.

I finally grasped the simple truth that imitating another actor did not mean creating an image. I realized that it was necessary to create one's own image—an image which, I must confess, I understood only outwardly. It is also true that I did not know how to approach the image unless I was helped by a stage director like Fedotov, or by chance, as when I played Sottenville, and therefore approached the image with pose, costume, make-up, manners or gestures.

Without the characteristic features typical of the rôle I felt on the stage as if I were undressed and was ashamed of appearing as myself before the spectators.

NEW PERPLEXITIES

Don't Live to Please Yourself and A Woman's Secret

THAT SAME SEASON I played Pyotr in Ostrovsky's *Don't Live to Please Yourself.* The story, in short, follows:

Pyotr, a rich merchant's son, is a debauchee. He is in love with Grusha, the daughter of the mistress of an inn, but so is the young and foolish merchant Vasya, who wants to marry her. With Grusha torturing and leading him on, Pyotr is afraid that he is not successful in his love-making. One of the habitués of the inn, the blacksmith Yeryomka, limping, terrible, red-headed, like Satan himself, offers to help him. Legend has it that blacksmiths, who pass their lives in the red light of their forges, have dealings with the Evil One, that they know how to make love potions and how to poison a rival. Yeryomka agrees to make a love potion for Grusha and to rid Pyotr of his rival. And so, a crime is perpetrated. Later Pyotr confesses.

Both the play and the rôle have scope, swing, strong passions, interesting psychological development, tragic uplift. It seemed that I had the necessary temperament, the figure and the voice. Besides, there were also tried methods, restraint, and certain technique. But all my new discoveries vanished as soon as I took up the rôle. From the very first I travelled along the upper folds of the rôle, along its periphery. I worked as an unconnected belt in a factory works while the machine which it is supposed to run is stationary. The belt works, but there are no results. I also worked like that, along the outer nerves and the periphery of the body, without touching the soul, which remained cold and inactive. Words, gestures, movements flew past real emotion like an express train past local stops, or like an empty ship, without helmsmen, passengers or cargo, which had broken away from her anchor. Mechanical outward play is a long way ahead of true inner experiences. In order to stop this meaningless movement along the surface of the rôle, it is necessary to pass the initiative of creating to intuition and emotion, which become the helmsmen of the ship of acting. It is necessary to instil an inner content in the rôle, as a ship is loaded with cargo and passengers.

How can one force emotions to leave their inner recesses and assume the initiative of creating? To do this it was necessary to interest emotion in the inner image of Pyotr, in his broad Russian spirit, his tempestuous character, his great passion that turns into jealousy, despair and madness.

But emotion was silent, and I could not make it appear artificially. I could only awaken muscular vigour with the aid of strained movements of the legs and arms, and at such times was unreasonably and mechanically excited. This excitement died out almost at once. It reminded me of a broken clock. If the hands are turned for a long time from the outside, they begin to hiss and show signs of life inside, and to strike irregularly. Similarly, outer physical excitement called forth in me chaotic inner emotions that died out immediately. Do they have any relation to the spiritual substance of the rôle or are they merely mechanical excitement that is brief and lifeless? But excitement alone does not count, for creative work is alien to it. And I had no other means. Without any inner guidance I was powerless in the face of the big tasks set me by tragedy. Like the frog in the fable I tried to look bigger and stronger than I was in order to resemble a paladin. In Gogol's words, I "aped" an image without being able to *become* one. I overtaxed my drowsy emotions. The results are obvious. There appeared spasms and petrification of the body, strain and anarchy of muscles, bad craftsmanship, acting of the old cut, and so forth. And while minor violation of nature and feeling is dangerous for our art generally, it is all the more so for tragic rôles where strain becomes tenfold in strength, for in these rôles one encounters big human experiences and creative tasks that are beyond an inexperienced actor's abilities. Just imagine that you are being forced to jump over a moat, or climb over a fence, or enter an apiary where you risk being stung. It is natural that you will resist, put out your arms not to let anyone near you, defend yourself against your attacker and do everything to avoid those things, although in themselves they are not difficult to do. Now imagine that you are being pushed into a lion's cage, or made to leap over a chasm, or to climb a perpendicular cliff. It is only natural that you will resist even more, that you will lift your hands to defend yourself against the person that tries to make you do those impossible things. And if, impossible as they are, you are still forced to do them, then you strain and overtax yourself precisely because you cannot fulfil the task.

Stanislavsky in 1890

An inexperienced actor often gets himself into such a predicament. He is forced to cry when he does not want to, laugh when he feels sad, suffer when he is happy, portray feelings that he does not feel. Hence, all sorts of compromises with nature to get out of the blind alley. And the whole thing ends in strain, violation, the squeezing of the throat, diaphragm and various muscles, false stage conventionalities with which the actor wants to deceive himself and his public. The only way out of this is through stage conventionalities which, if used too much, turn into stamps.

The harder the task before an actor, the more strain there is and the more timid feeling uses its invisible buffers. The more hopeless is the actor's position, the more timid his feeling becomes, the more used it becomes to putting up its buffers, the more it is forced into conventionalities and the more does it resort to stamps and stagy craftsmanship.

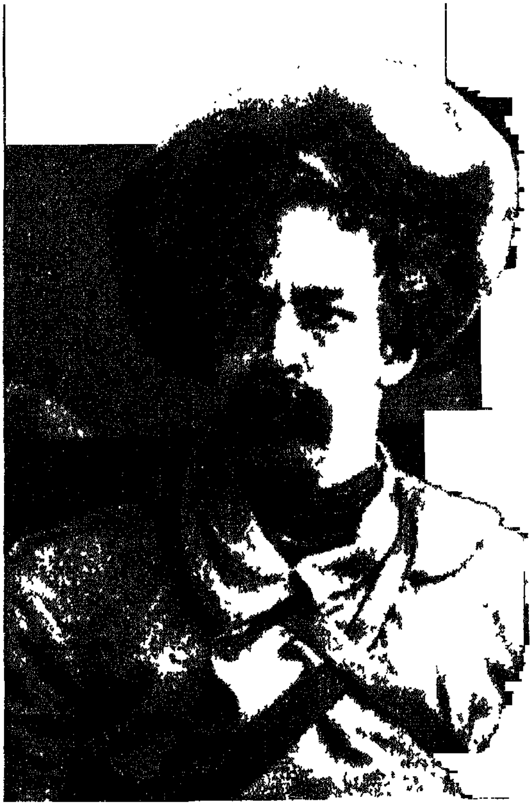
There are decent stamps. For instance, with time and if its inner content is neglected, a well-created rôle turns into an outer stamp. But it speaks of something good that has been experienced. However bad it may be, it cannot be compared with another stamp that tries to speak of something that has not been experienced, a stamp that tries to replace truth by actor's outworn stencils.

Of all existing stencils, the worst is that of the Russian paladin, of the Russian knight, the son of a boyar, or the village youth with their width and breadth of soul and character. For these there exist a specific manner of walking, wide gestures that are established once for all, traditional posing with hands on the hips, mighty heaving of the head to free it from the falling waves of hair, a special manner of holding the hat, which is mercilessly crumpled for the mechanical strengthening of passion, bold vocal attempts at the high notes of the register, and a chanting diction in the lyric places of the part. These faults have entered so much into the ears, eyes, body and muscles of actors that there is no possibility of getting rid of them.

To my misfortune, at that time the opera *The Enemy's Host* by Serov was very much in fashion. This opera was adapted from Ostrovsky's *Don't Live to Please Yourself*. If the stencil of the Russian paladin is bad in drama, then in the opera it is altogether unbearable. The opera stencil of Pyotr is the worst of all possible stencils. And it was exactly that stencil that took possession of me, for I still admired the opera. I only had to feel the old familiar stage methods and their companion feelings and, like a smoker after a long period of denial of the weed, I would surrender myself to all the bad habits of stagecraft that I knew.

The harm of that performance was understandable. But there was some use too. With the aid of the rule of the contraries it showed (although, unfortunately, it failed to convince me) that tragedy and powerful drama, demanding as they do tenfold strain, violate emotion more than anything else, if that emotion does not awaken of itself, intuitively, or with the help of a correctly acquired inner technique. That is why the harm done by tragic rôles can be so great, and I would like to warn young actors who, without having acquired technique, want to play Hamlet, Othello and other tragic rôles. Before they undertake such work, they should acquire more methods of inner technique.

Neither Ostrovsky's play nor my part achieved any success. The result was temporary despair and loss of confidence in myself. But like any other play, however untalented, this one had its admirers, and that comforted me. My failure did not persuade me that it was too early to tackle tragic rôles, and I continued to dream obstinately of tragedy, thus retarding my own natural development.



As Neshchastlivtsev in Ostrovsky's *The Forest* (1890)

I don't know how to explain my remarkable success in the vaudeville skit *A Woman's Secret,* where I again played the student Megrio, the part I had enacted at our home circle performance. I altered nothing in my interpretation, although my former principle of acting was doubtlessly false. This principle was to play as fast as possible so as not to bore the spectator. The patter of words, non-stop action, raising tone just for the sake of tone, the swiftness of tempo for the sake of swiftness, all the mistakes that I had committed before I now committed again. But to my amazement, my severest critics–Fedotov, Komissarzhevsky and Sollogub–liked it and praised me for my performance. The only explanation was in my youth and the fire with which I played. This is an important quality that is lost in later years. Apparently, all the rôles that I took seriously were successful because they were filled with the same fire, which enlivens acting. This is why I often hear my old admirers tell me that in those days, when we were not learned in our art, we played much better than we do now, when we know a little about it. How to keep that young fire in oneself? What a pity it is that it disappears! Can one really not technically remember and fix in one's mind that which is so splendid in one's youth, that which intuitively made me live Megrio?

Listening to the applause after the fall of the curtain, I again said to myself:

"So, after all, I can play a lover; so after all, I can play myself, and all the operetta tempo and patter are allowable."

And again I began to believe in them and their roots came to life within me.

THE MEININGEN PLAYERS

IT WAS AT THAT TIME that the famous company of the Duke of Meiningen, headed by the stage director Cronegk, came to Moscow.[24] Their performances showed the Muscovites for the first time productions that were historically true, with mass scenes, splendid outer form and amazing discipline. I did not miss a single one of their performances, and I went not only to see but to study as well.

It was said that the company did not have a single talented actor. This was untrue. There were Barnay, Teller, Link, and others. One may disagree with German pathos and the German manner of playing tragedies. Perhaps the Meiningen Players brought little that was new into the old stagy methods of acting. But it would be wrong to maintain that all they did was only outward. When Cronegk was told so, he exclaimed:

"I brought them Shakespeare and Schiller, and all they are interested in is the furniture. What kind of a taste have they, anyway?"

Cronegk was right, for the spirit of Schiller and Shakespeare lived in his players.

The Duke of Meiningen was able, merely by using stage-direction methods and without the help of extraordinary stage talents, to show much in the creative works of the great poets. I shall never forget a scene from *The Maid of Orleans.* A skinny, miserable-looking, bewildered king sits on a tremendous throne; his thin legs dangle in the air. Around the throne is the confused court, which does everything to uphold royal prestige. But when power is crumbling deep bows and curtseys seem out of place. Into this picture of the royal degradation enter the English ambassadors, tall, stately, decisive, courageous and impudent. The scorn and arrogance of these conquerors are unbearable. When the unhappy king gives a humiliating order, one insulting to his own dignity, the courtier who receives it tries to bow before he leaves the king's presence. But no sooner has he begun the bow than he stops in indecision, straightens up, and stands with lowered eyes. Then as tears swell in them, he runs out, forgetting etiquette in order not to lose control of himself before the entire court.

The spectators wept with him, and I wept too, for the ingenuity of the stage director created a tremendous effect.

Stage direction was splendid also in the other moments of the humiliation of the French king: the grim atmosphere at the court, the appearance of Joan of Arc. The stage director thickened the atmosphere of the defeated court so that the spectator waits impatiently for the coming of the Maid, and he is so glad when she does come that he does not notice the acting. The talent of the stage director concealed the shortcomings of the actors.

There is a great deal the stage director can do, but not everything. The most important thing is in the hands of the actors, whom one must help, who must be guided in the proper direction. The Meiningen directors seemingly paid but little attention to helping the actors, with the result that they were obliged to create without the help of the actors. The plans of the director were spiritually deep and comprehensive. How could they be realized without the help of the actor? And so, most attention was paid not to the acting but to the production. The necessity to create for everybody made the stage director a despot.

It seemed to me that we amateur directors were in the same predicament as Cronegk and the Duke of Meiningen. We too wanted to stage spectacles and disclose great thoughts and emotions. But because we did not have experienced actors, we had to put everything into the hands of the stage director.

He had to create by himself, with the aid of the production, scenery, properties, interesting *mises-en-scène* and hokum. This is why I considered the despotism of the Meiningen stage directors fully justified. I sympathized with Cronegk and tried to learn his methods of work. Here is what I found out from persons who dealt with him and attended his rehearsals.

Outside the theatre Cronegk's relations even with the third-rate actors of his company were simple and friendly. He seemed to flaunt this simplicity of conduct. But he became an altogether different man as soon as a rehearsal began. He sat in complete silence and waited for the hands of the clock to reach the time for the rehearsal to begin. Then he would ring a large bell and declare in a quiet voice, "*Anfangen.*"* Everything quieted down; the actors became different people. The rehearsal would begin at once and continue until he rang the bell again. Then he would make his remarks in a dispassionate voice, ring the bell again, repeat the fatal *Anfangen* and the rehearsal would continue.

And now there was an unexpected stop and confusion on the stage. The actors whispered, the assistant directors ran about. Something seemed to have happened. One of the leading actors was late, and it was necessary to leave his monologue out. The assistant director informed Cronegk and waited for his instructions, standing near the prompter's box. Everybody was quiet, waiting impatiently for Cronegk to break the long, seemingly endless pause. Cronegk sat thinking, deciding, while everybody stood waiting for the verdict. At last he pronounced it:

"While we are in Moscow, the rôles of X (the actor who is late) will be played by actor Y, and as far as X is concerned, I will let him lead the extras in the rear."

And the rehearsal continued, with an understudy in the part of the actor who was late.

At another time, Cronegk, after a performance of Schiller's *Robbers,* held a court. One of his assistants, reportedly a light-minded young man, was late in letting a group of extras out on the stage. After the performance Cronegk called him over and began to reproach him softly. But the assistant tried to laugh the matter off.

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* Let's start. (Ger.)

"Herr Schultz," Cronegk said to a passing stage hand, "tell me, please, at what words in such and such a scene does a group of robbers come on the stage from the left?"

The stage hand declaimed a whole monologue, trying to show his acting abilities. Cronegk patted him on the shoulder, and turning to his assistant, said severely:

"He is a simple stage hand. And you are a director and my assistant. Shame on you. Pfui!"

I appreciated the good that the Meiningen Players brought us, i.e., their director's methods of bringing out the spiritual contents of the drama. I am deeply grateful to them for this.

The Meiningen Players ushered in a new important phase in the life of our Society and especially in my life. But they exerted an evil influence on me as well. Cronegk's restraint and cold-bloodedness were to my taste and I wanted to imitate him. With time I also became a despot and many Russian stage directors began to imitate me in my despotism as I imitated Cronegk.[25] There was a whole generation of despotic stage directors, who, alas, did not have the talents of Cronegk or of the Duke of Meiningen. These directors of the new type became mere producers who made of the actor a stage property, a pawn that was moved about in their *mises-en-scène.*

TRADE EXPERIENCE

OUR LOSSES, or rather mine, were so great that we decided to close the Society, and called a liquidation meeting at which we drafted a report on its closing. I was in the act of signing it when someone's hand stopped me. It was Pavel Ivanovich Blaramberg, a well-known composer and a member of our Society.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You are not going to liquidate such a beautiful beginning which has already displayed such vitality? I won't allow it! Cut down your expenses, do away with all the deadwood, but preserve what you have started. This amateur circle must continue at all costs. You only need very little for that, and I don't believe that it will ruin any of you rich men. Right after this liquidation meeting you will dine in a restaurant and spend enough money to finance the Society for a month or two. Sacrifice four or five dinners and save this good beginning that might do so much to advance art. Give me a sheet of paper. I am not rich, but I will sign my name first. And tear up your report."

The list passed the rounds. It gave little, but that little was enough to begin a simple amateur circle on the very humblest of bases. Nevertheless, we went to a restaurant right after and spent enough to support our Society for a month.

At the beginning of the season our Society of Art and Literature found a small apartment and furnished it. Administrative posts were divided among the members who worked without remuneration. There was not enough to pay the stage director, and therefore, willy-nilly, I was forced to take over from Fedotov.

We could no longer afford the big building of the Society and we rented it out to the Hunting Club which asked us to give one performance a week for their family evenings. We took on ourselves the tremendous task of producing a new play each week, as was the custom in all the other theatres of Moscow. But the professionals had experience and the technique of the trade for such work. We did not, and therefore what we undertook was beyond our strength. Yet there was no other way out.

First of all, we revived old plays.

During one of the rehearsals of Pisemsky's *Usurpers of the Law,* Glikeria Fedotova, the ex-wife of Alexander Fedotov, who had just left us, entered the room. She sat down at the director's table, and said:

"Two years ago I warned you, but you would not listen to me. And I did not come to you. But now, when everybody has left you, I have come to work with you. Let's begin. And may God bless us."

We came to life. Fedotova hand an altogether different method of work from her husband. The latter saw a picture, images, and drew them. She felt emotion and tried to recreate it. Fedotov and Fedotova seemed to supplement each other.

Fedotova took over the dramatic department of our circle. She helped us to perfect the productions we were preparing. As soon as we saved a little money, we invited old experienced actors of the Maly Theatre to help Fedotova. With them we produced many plays for our scheduled performances in the Hunting Club.

What did these new directors give us? While Fedotov took care of the production in general, and Fedotova re-created emotion, the new directors drew images, and not so much from their inner as their outer side.[26] Moreover, since the arrangement with the Hunting Club forced us to give a new performance each week the new directors showed us trade tricks and familiarized us with old accepted stencils. With the help of their methods, we accumulated a great deal of specific stage experience, stage habits, resourcefulness, and confidence in our action. Thanks to practice, our voices became stronger; we worked out the habit of talking loudly and behaving confidently on the stage. The spectator believed that we had the right to be on the stage, and that we were not there by accident; that we had the right to speak and that the spectators must listen to us. This distinguished us from amateurs who come out on the stage and seem to doubt if they have business on it. And the spectator, looking at such amateurs, is not at all sure he must listen to them. Of course in places, despite the will of the amateur, he is suddenly fired, and the spectator with him. But the artistic fire dies out at once, and the helpless actor stands on the stage like a chance guest, while the spectator ceases to believe in him.

In a word, our practice made us scenic on the boards of the stage, and we were happy. But I doubt very much that our achievements made Glikeria Fedotova, who guided our creative emotions, very happy. The problems she set us were extremely complex. Her art was to be learned systematically and in easy stages.

The new directors suited us perfectly. They simply taught us to act, and we liked it, for it gave us the illusion that we were doing a big and productive job. The task of staging a different play every week was beyond our strength and—though useful in a way, as I have said above—did us a lot of harm, multiplying our bad habits and equipping us with acting stencils of the worst possible type. The Hunting Club shows added somewhat to our popularity and I cherish fond memories of our pleasant association with it.

And then there was another thing of which I should like to say a few words. At that time there came to Moscow Vera Komissarzhevskaya and she stopped with her father, who continued to conduct our Society's opera class, which limited the number of pupils to a minimum. Komissarzhevsky had a little flat in the Society building, and his daughter was given a corner furnished with stage properties. There, away from everyone, she strummed her guitar and hummed sad gypsy songs of love, betrayal and woman's sufferings.

One day, the leading lady of the exquisite one-act *Burning Letters*[27] (by Gnedich) fell ill, and we asked Vera to take her place. The Moscow début of the future celebrity was extremely successful.

And then, at the very height of the season, a disaster befell us: the Hunting Club burned down and our performances ceased.

There was nothing for us to do while the new, and even more luxurious, club was being built, and we were compelled to stage performances on our own.

FIRST EXPERIENCE AS A DIRECTOR

The Fruits of Enlightenment

WE WERE LUCKY to get Lev Tolstoi's play, *The Fruits of Enlightenment.* He had written it as a lark for a domestic performance and it was first produced in Yasnaya Polyana. No one believed we would get permission to produce it publicly. But the censors allowed us to give a private performance. Tolstoi's popularity made it easy to overcome this difficulty.

The job of directing the play was entrusted to me and that was my first directorial effort in drama.

The Fruits of Enlightenment presented many difficulties for the stage director because there are many *dramatis personae* and complicated *mises-en-scène* in it. I approached the task simply. I showed what I imagined to the actors and they imitated me. Where my feelings were true, the play came to life; where there was only outer ingenuity it remained dead. The only good thing about my work at that time was the fact that I tried to be sincere. I sought the truth, and did not tolerate falseness, especially theatrical and trade

As Zvezdintsev in Lev Tolstoi's *The Fruits of Enlightenment* (1891)

falseness. I began to hate the theatre in the theatre. More than anything else I wanted a truthful, real life, not commonplace life, but artistic life. Perhaps at that time I did not know the difference between artistic and commonplace life on the stage. Moreover, I understood life too superficially. But even this superficial truth that I was seeking helped me to give a true and scenically interesting *mise-en-scène* which pushed me on to the truth. The truth stimulated emotion, and emotion aroused creative intuition.

Fortunately, chance came to my assistance: the play was excellently cast. Most of the actors seemed to have been born for their parts. The play is about aristocrats, servants and peasants. The aristocrats were played by real society people—a very rare thing in the theatre. Others looked typical enough to play the servants, and among the peasants there was Vladimir Lopatin, the brother of the famous Russian philosopher, Lev Lopatin. Vladimir, who later played in our theatre under the name of Mikhailov, had captivated Tolstoi by his portrayal when the play was performed at the great writer's home. The great writer, seeing a good actor who understood the soul of a Russian peasant, rewrote and enlarged the part.

There were very successful performances by many of the future players of the Moscow Art Theatre, among them Samarova, Lilina, Luzhsky, Mikhailov, Artyom, Alexandrov, Sanin, and Vera Komissarzhevskaya, who appeared under the name of Komina.

The production taught me the administrative side of the director's work. It is not easy to manage a group of actors when they labour under strain and excitement. An actor is capricious and whimsical, and one must know how to handle him. A director must have authority, and at that time I did not have it. I stimulated everyone with my fanatical love of work, my ability to work, and my strictness, especially to myself. The first person I fined was myself, and this was done so convincingly that no one could question my sincerity. I cruelly punished people for being late for rehearsals, for not learning their part, for talking during work, for leaving the rehearsal hall without permission. I knew that disorder would lead to utter lack of discipline—the reason why I had fled from the amateur circles. I forbade the players, particularly the women, to come to rehearsals gaudily attired—we did not need garishness in our work. And I prohibited flirting.

"I don't mind serious love," I said. "It inspires you. Shoot yourselves for the sake of a woman, drown yourselves, die! But I won't tolerate playing with feelings; that only creates an unhealthy atmosphere and causes degradation." I was quite a Puritan in those days.

Our poverty did not allow us to dream of luxurious scenery, although good scenery is the only thing that saves amateurs, for the artist, his line and colour cover their sins. It is not for nothing that many talentless actors and directors deliberately hide themselves behind the scenery, costumes, colour spots, cubism, futurism, and all the *isms* that are meant to impress the inexperienced and naïve spectator. On the contrary, with bad scenery that does not deserve a second look, the actor and the director can be seen at their best or their worst. A play must be well acted and directed when there is nothing but the inner content.

We tried honestly to interpret what was so splendidly written by Tolstoi. We reacted to all that we felt in the play, in the rôle, the *mises-en-scène,* in the costumes and the scenery, in ourselves, in our partners, in various incidents. Where there was not enough intuition, the play was empty and dead. In those places which we could not feel, we simply spoke our lines in tempo, as if wishing to pass them by as quickly as we could not to slow down the action.

The play was extraordinarily successful and the repeat performances helped us out of our financial difficulties.

Its usefulness lay in the fact that I had found not the highway but a side path to the soul of the artiste, the road from the outer to the inner, from the body to the soul, from the embodiment to the inner creation, from the form to the substance. I learned to make *mises-en-scène* that revealed the inner seed of the play.

What was good and new in this production was that we prevented all that was bad in the old.

PERSONAL SUCCESS

The Village of Stepanchikovo

AT THE BEGINNING of the following season the Hunting Club rented and renovated the former Moscow City Council building. With the reopening of the club we resumed our weekly performances. This supplied us with the necessary finances. To satisfy our spiritual demands, we decided to stage plays that would help us to demonstrate our artistic achievements.

For our next production we chose my dramatization of Dostoyevsky's *The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants.* Dostoyevsky's widow told me that he had begun writing the thing as a play, but gave up the idea because its production would have been attended by a great deal of censorship trouble, and he needed money in a hurry. My stage version was banned by the censors. Heeding the advice of my more experienced friends I altered the names of the *dramatis personae.* Its production was permitted almost without any changes.

The rôle of the uncle and the play itself were extremely important for me as an actor for the following reasons: in the repertoire of an actor, among the many parts he has played there are some that seem to have been long maturing in his inner consciousness. One only has to touch the rôle and it comes to life without any pangs of creation, without quest or technical work. Nature itself, in its own good time, has created that rôle. The part and the image are what they are. They cannot be otherwise. It is difficult to analyze them, just as it is difficult to analyze one's own soul.

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Kostenev (Rostanev) and Maria Lilina as Nastenka in Dostoyevsky's *The Village of Stepanchikovo and Its Inhabitants* (1891)

Such was the rôle of the uncle in *The Village of Stepanchikovo*. I naturally fully agreed with him: we had the same views, the same thoughts and the same desires. I disagreed when I was told that he was naive, that he was not very clever, that he made too much ado about nothing. In my opinion the things that excited him were very important from the view-point of humaneness When I played the part, I was ashamed of myself that I, an old man, had fallen in love with a young woman. Did we suit each other? Foma, people said, was a scoundrel. But what if he really cared for me and spent nights praying, if he taught me for my own good, if he seemed a selfless man? Why didn't I throw him out, I may be asked? But could I have handled all the old women and spongers without him? Why, they would have eaten me alive! They say that in the end the uncle becomes a lion. But I look at it much more simply. He did what any man in love would have done. Having analyzed the play, I agree that Rostanev chose the right way. Briefly, for the duration of the play, I became Rostanev. Try to understand this magic (for the actor) word *become.* Gogol said that any second-rate actor "can imitate an image, but only a true talent can *become* an image." If that is so, then I had talent, for in this rôle I *became* Rostanev, while in my other rôles I merely copied and aped other people's or my own images.

What a happiness it is to feel, even if once in a lifetime, what a real actor must feel and do on the stage! It's paradise for the actor, and I came to know it in the course of my work; and having come to know it, I refused to accept anything else in art. Were there no technical means of entering the paradise of art consciously, of one's own will? Only when technique makes this possible will our stage craftsmanship become a true art. But where and how is one to seek the means and ways of creating this technique?! That is the uppermost problem in the life of every true actor.

I don't know how I played the part. I will not undertake to praise or criticize myself. I felt true artistic joy, and I was not perturbed by the fact that financially the performance was a flop.

Very few people appreciated Dostoyevsky on the stage, or our effort to put him there.

The famous writer Grigorovich, a friend of Dostoyevsky and Turgenev, rushed in after the performance, shouting enthusiastically that not, since *The Inspector-General,* had the theatre seen such bright, colourful images. The genius of Dostoyevsky had captivated him and revived memories, which, however, I do not consider right to make public since Grigorovich himself did not deem it necessary to do so.

Thus, in *The Village of Stepanchikovo* I came to know the real joys of a true actor and creator.

LEV TOLSTOI

AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, our amateur circle gave several performances in Tula. The rehearsals and all the other preparations were held in the hospitable home of Nikolai Vasilyevich Davydov,[28] a close friend of Tolstoi. The entire household adapted itself to the needs of our company. Between rehearsals there were merry dinners. Even our host, no longer a young man, became a veritable schoolboy.

During one of these dinners, at the very height of our merry-making, we saw a man in a peasant's coat enter the hall. A minute later, he entered the dining-room: an old man with a long beard, dressed in a gray blouse, with a belt around his waist, in felt boots. He was greeted with joyous acclamation. At first I did not realize it was Lev Tolstoi. There is no photograph or painting that does justice to his lively face and figure. How could a sheet of paper or canvas depict eyes that pierced the soul and saw the inside? They were now sharp and pricking, now soft, sunny and heart warming. When Tolstoi looked at a man he grew motionless and concentrated; he penetrated into the man's soul and seemed to suck out all that was good and evil in it. At such moments his eyes hid behind the heavy eyelids like the sun behind clouds. At other moments he would jest like a child, burst into merry laughter, and his piercing eyes would come out from behind his heavy eyelids and sparkle humorously. Let anyone express an interesting thought, and Tolstoi would be the first to appreciate it. He would become youthfully enthusiastic and lively, and his eyes would light up with the fire of a genius.

That evening, he was serene, soft-spoken, kind, and courteous. As he entered the room, the children leaped from their places and surrounded him. He knew each by name and nickname, and asked intimate questions which we outsiders did not understand.

We were introduced to him one by one, and he shook hands with each of us, eyeing us sharply. I felt as if I had been pierced by a bullet. This unexpected meeting with Tolstoi left me thunderstruck. I was so struck, in fact, that I forgot where I was or what I was doing. To understand my feelings one has to know how much he meant to us.

While he lived we used to say, "We are happy indeed to live in his time!" And when we felt bad and people became abhorrent, we found consolation in the thought that there was Lev Tolstoi in Yasnaya Polyana, and things again became bright.

Lev Nikolayevich sat down opposite me.

I must have looked very funny and strange, for he often glanced curiously at me. Suddenly he leaned towards me and asked me something. I could not concentrate enough to understand him. There was an outburst of laughter and I became even more embarrassed.

What Tolstoi wanted to know was what play we were going to stage in Tula, and I could not for the world remember its name. Some body helped me out.

The great writer did not know Ostrovsky's *The Last Victim* and unashamedly confessed it. Only he could have acknowledged something that most of us would have concealed so as not to seem ignorant. He had a right to forget what any simple mortal is obliged to know.

"What is it about?" he asked. The room grew still waiting for my story, but like a schoolboy that was flunking in his examination, I could not force myself to begin. All my efforts were in vain and only made people laugh. My neighbour was no braver and his story also aroused laughter. We were all saved by our host, who outlined the play.

Confused by my failure, I fell silent, looking guiltily at Lev Nikolayevich.

The servant brought in a roast.

"Lev Nikolayevich, how about a bit of meat?" the adults and the children pestered the vegetarian.

"Why not?" Lev Nikolayevich jested.

Several large pieces of meat were piled in his plate. Amidst general laughter, the famous vegetarian cut himself a tiny piece, began to chew it, forced himself to swallow it, and put down his fork and knife.

"I can't eat a corpse! It's poison! Leave meat alone, and you will know what good humour and a clear head are!" Having mounted his hobby, Lev Nikolayevich began to develop his well-known theory of vegetarianism.

Tolstoi could speak of most boring things and make them sound interesting. He proved that vividly after dinner. We were having our coffee in the semi-dark study, and for more than an hour he described a talk he had with some sectarian whose religion was based on symbols. An apple-tree against a red sky meant a certain event in their lives and augured something good or evil. A dark pine against a moonlit sky meant something altogether different; the flight of a bird across a cloudless sky or the appearance of a storm-cloud—all had their special meaning. We were surprised by Tolstoi's memory, for he recounted all the symbols of the sect and interested us in a tedious story.

Then we began talking about the theatre, boasting that we were the first in Moscow to stage *The Fruits of Enlightenment.*

"Make an old man happy; get the censors to allow *The Power of Darkness* and play it," he told us.

"And you will let us stage it?" we cried in chorus.

"I have never forbidden anyone to stage my plays," he answered.

There and then we began to cast the play, decide who would direct it and how, and asked Lev Nikolayevich to come to the rehearsals. Incidentally, we took advantage of his presence to decide which of the variants of the fourth act we were to play and how to combine them into one so as not to detract from its climax. We attacked Lev Nikolayevich with all our youthful energy. An outsider might well have thought that we were considering some affair that could not wait and that the rehearsals were beginning on the following day.

We found it easy to talk to Tolstoi, for he bore himself simply at this premature meeting. His eyes, that had been hiding behind his heavy lids, were sparkling youthfully.

"Look," Lev Nikolayevich suddenly livened up as a new idea struck him, "write down how you plan to connect the parts and I will rewrite the play as you wish."

The young man to whom these words were addressed became so confused that he hid behind another man. Lev Nikolayevich understood our confusion and began to encourage us, saying that there was nothing unfeasible in his offer. On the contrary, he added, we would be doing him a favour because we were specialists. But even Tolstoi could not persuade us of that.

It was some years before I saw Tolstoi again. The censorship ban on *The Power of Darkness* was lifted, and it was produced all over Russia. Naturally it was staged as Tolstoi had written it, without the fourth-act variants being combined. It was said that Tolstoi had seen the play in various theatres and that he liked some things in it and disliked others.

Some more time passed. One day I unexpectedly received a note from one of Tolstoi's friends who informed me that the great writer wanted to see me. I went at once and Tolstoi received me in one of the rooms of his Moscow residence. He was not satisfied with the performances and the play itself.

"Will you please remind me how you wanted to change the fourth act. I will change it, and you will play it."

Tolstoi said this so simply that I found it easy to explain my plan. We spoke for a very long time, without knowing that his wife, Sophia Andreyevna, was in the next room.

Put yourself in her place. She was a very zealous champion of her talented husband. And here was a young man who was teaching him how his play should be written. That was the height of impudence–if one did not know what had taken place before.

Sophia Andreyevna could not bear it. She ran into the room and attacked me. I confess that I got a fine dressing-down. I would have got even a finer one if their daughter, Maria Lvovna, had not come in and calmed her mother. And all the while Lev Nikolayevich sat quiet twisting his beard. He did not utter a single word in my defence.

When his wife left us, and I remained standing completely nonplussed, he smiled affably and said:

"Don't mind her. She is very nervous and in a bad mood. Now, where were we?"

I remember another chance meeting with Tolstoi in one of the alleys near his house. This was in the days when he was writing his famous diatribe against war and the military. I was with a friend who knew Tolstoi well. I became timid because he looked very morose, and his eyes were hidden behind his lids. He was nervous and irascible. I walked politely behind him, listening very carefully to what he was saying. He was talking of what he had written in his article. With unusual temperament and ardour he raised his voice against legalized murder. He attacked military men and their customs, and all the more convincingly because in his time he had gone through more than one military campaign. His accusation was not based only on theory but on his own experience. I shall never forget his drooping eyebrows, his burning eyes in which tears were ready to appear at any moment, the severe and at the same time excited voice.

Suddenly from around a corner there appeared two tall guardsmen in long greatcoats, shining helmets, with swords rattling resoundingly on the cobblestones. Handsome, young, stately, with courageous faces and excellent bearing, they looked magnificent. Tolstoi stopped in the middle of a sentence, his mouth half-opened, his hands caught in the midst of the gesture, his face lighting up.

"A-ha!" his sigh could be heard at the other end of the alley. "Good! Fine fellows!" And with great enthusiasm he began to explain the meaning of military bearing. In that moment one could easily recognize an old and experienced officer in him.

Much time passed. Once in going through the contents of my desk I found an unopened letter from Tolstoi. I was frightened. There were several pages in his own hand about the epic of the Dukhobors, and he was asking me to help in collecting money for their emigration from Russia. How the letter could have remained there so long I do not understand even now.

I wanted to explain the reason for my silence to Tolstoi personally. A friend of mine, who was very close to Tolstoi's family, proposed that I take advantage of Tolstoi's appointment with a writer which he, my friend, had arranged. He hoped to take me to Tolstoi either before or after the appointment. Unfortunately, I did not see Tolstoi, for the writer had detained him too long. I was not present at their meeting, but I was told what had happened in the room while I was waiting outside.

First of all, my friend said, imagine two figures: one, Lev Nikolayevich; the other, a thin, tired-looking writer with long hair, with a large soft collar, without a tie, sitting as if on needles and speaking for a whole hour in a queer language with newly-invented words of how he is seeking and creating a new art. A stream of foreign words, quotations from all sorts of new authors, philosophy, excerpts from new-style poems illustrated the newly-invented basis of poetry and art. All this was said for the sake of describing the plans for a new monthly magazine which he was preparing to publish and for which he wanted Tolstoi to write.

For almost an hour Lev Nikolayevich listened attentively and patiently, walking up and down the room. At times he stopped and pierced the man with his sharp eyes. Then he would turn away and, putting his hands in his belt, would again pace the room, listening attentively.

At last the writer grew quiet.

"That's all," he said.

Tolstoi continued to walk up and down the room, while the writer wiped his brow and fanned himself with his handkerchief. There was a long silence. At last Tolstoi stopped before the man, and looked severely at him.

"Too hazy!" he said, stressing the letter *a,* as if trying to say, "Are you trying to fool me, an old man?"

Having said this, Tolstoi went to the door, opened it, stepped over the threshold, and turned to the writer:

"I always thought that a writer writes when he has something to say, when something is ripe in his mind and he is ready to put it on paper. But I could never understand why I must write for a magazine only in March or October."

With these words Tolstoi went out.

SUCCESS

Uriel Acosta

URIEL ACOSTA, a play by Gutzkow, was next staged by the Society of Art and Literature.

The story, briefly, is as follows: Acosta, a Jewish philosopher, has written a book which is blasphemous from the view-point of fanatical rabbis. The latter appear at a garden party given by the rich Manasseh, whose daughter is in love with Acosta, and curse the heretic. From this moment Acosta becomes outlawed and accursed. There is only one way of cleansing himself: he must publicly repudiate his ideas and beliefs. His teacher, his bride, his mother and his brothers beg him to repent. After a superhuman inner struggle between the philosopher and the lover, the lover is victorious in Acosta. For the sake of love the philosopher goes to the synagogue to deny his ideas of religion. During the denial, however, the ideas prove stronger than love. Acosta reiterates his heresy and a mob of fanatical Jews tries to kill him. Acosta sees his beloved for the last time at her wedding to a rich man. But, true to her love, she takes poison and dies in the arms of the heretic. Acosta kills himself. Love, thus, celebrates its victory with two deaths.

In my interpretation, the philosopher won over the lover. Spiritually I was well equipped to portray conviction, fortitude and courage wherever the rôle demanded them. But, as usual, I failed miserably in the love scenes: I played them flabbily, effeminately and sentimentally.

I was funny indeed–tall, powerfully built, with strong arms and body and a deep voice, I would suddenly use the methods of a weak, effeminate opera tenor. Could one with such gifts as mine look languishingly into the distance, sentimentally and tenderly admire his beloved, and weep? Can anything, indeed, be worse on the stage than a weeping man or one with an oversweet smile?

I did not understand then that there is masculine lyricism, masculine tenderness and dreaminess, and masculine love, and that sentimentality is only a weak substitute for real feeling. Nor did I understand that the most tenor-like tenor and the tenderest lyrical *ingénue* must first of all take care that their love emotions are strong and virile. The more lyrical and tender love is, the clearer and stronger must be the colour that characterizes it. Just as in a young man, sentimentality that is as yielding as a custard pie in a healthy, strong and beautiful girl creates a dissonance because of its contrast with her youthful nature.

That is why the love scenes lost so much in my interpretation. But luckily for me, there were very few of them in the play. The strong places of the rôle, in which the staunch beliefs of the philosopher revealed themselves, were successful, and if it had not been for the traces of opera technique which, to a considerable degree remained in me from the old days, I would have played the part to the satisfaction of all.

There was yet another great shortcoming, which I did not want to admit I was out of tune with the text I knew well this defect; it was an old one In my early years, as now, it prevented me from surrendering completely to intuition and emotion, forcing me to watch myself continually on the stage. In moments of complete spiritual revelation my memory is capable of going back on me and breaking the continuity of the text. And were this to happen–there would be trouble· a pause, a white blot in my mind . . and panic. This dependence on the text when uncertain about my memory, the necessity of always keeping it in mind, prevents me from giving myself wholly and fully to climactic moments. When I am free of this dependence, as, for instance, in pauses or during rehearsals, when I speak my own words without having learned the text, when words come by themselves, I can fully reveal myself and show all that is in my soul.

In the title rôle of K. Gutzkow's *Uriel Acosta* (1895)

It is extremely important for an actor to have a good memory. How sorry I am that mine was spoilt in school by senseless cramming.

Young actors should cherish and develop their memory, for it is vastly important in all the moments of creation and particularly in climactic moments.

Under the influence of the Meiningen Players we pinned more hope than was necessary on the outward side of the production, especially on the costumes the historical truthfulness to the epoch of the play, and most of all on the mass scenes, which at that time were a great novelty in the theatre. With the despotism that was part of me at that time, I used to overrule everything, take all into my directing hands, ordering the actors about as if they were puppets. The only exception I made was in the case of the more talented actors, like Vasily Luzhsky and Georgy Burdzhalov, who later became famous in the Moscow Art Theatre, the gifted Alexander Sanin and Nikolai Popov, subsequently well-known stage directors, and a few others. The other amateurs demanded despotic treatment. Talentless people must be subjected to simple training, dressed to the taste of the director and made to act according to his will. If one is forced to give talentless actors big parts one is also forced, for the sake of the performance, to hide their faults. For this there are many excellent ways which I had learned to perfection by that time. They covered the lapses of the bad actors like screens. For instance, in the second act of *Uriel Acosta* at Manasseh's garden party, two leading actors were talentless amateurs. To divert the attention of the spectators from them, I chose the most beautiful woman and the handsomest man, dressed them in the most garish costumes you could find, and put them in the most prominent spot on the stage. I told the man energetically to court the woman and the woman to flirt piquantly. Later I invented a whole scene for them and thus drew the spectators' attention away from the faulty actors. Only in the places necessary for the exposition of the play, did I stop the action of the extras temporarily to give the spectators an opportunity to hear the important words. Simple, wasn't it? Of course, stage directors were criticized for doing such things. But it is better to be criticized for trying too much than to admit the company's incompetence.

Besides, if the play and its interpreters are to be successful there must be climaxes, culminating moments of the play. And when these climaxes cannot

Scene from *Uriel Acosta*, fourth act (1895)

be built up with the help of actors, it is necessary to resort to the stage director's assistance. I had a bagful of tricks just for such occasions.

For instance, in *Uriel Acosta* there are two places that are meant to impress the spectator deeply. The first is the excommunication of Acosta at Manasseh's garden party in the second act. The second is the renunciation by Acosta in the synagogue in the fourth act. One scene is, so to say, of a society character, the other of a popular nature. For the first scene, I needed beautiful society women and young men (I disguised the awkward and the ugly with the aid of characteristic make-up and costumes). For the second climatic scene I needed young hot-headed students whom I had to hold back from being too natural and hurting Acosta, that is, myself When the curtain rose in the second act to reveal a garden with numerous dais which permitted grouping players most picturesquely, and the spectators saw a bouquet of society belles and handsome men in marvellous costumes, they rose from their seats in admiration. The lackeys carry about wine and sweetmeats, the gentlemen court the ladies, the ladies flirt, rolling their eyes and covering their faces with fans, the music plays, some dance, others make picturesque groups. The host passes with old men and honoured guests who are greeted profusely and seated. Acosta is there, too, but the guests leave him one by one until he is alone. That is where Manasseh's daughter, Judith, approaches the heretic. The voices of the merry-makers blend with the music.

Suddenly, the noise is pierced by the ominous sound of a horn followed by squeaks of clarions and bass voices. The merry-making stops. Then confusion and panic. This is caused by the appearance from a dais at the back of the black and terrible rabbis. The servants of the synagogue, holding candles, carry sacred books and scrolls. Praying cloths are thrown over ball costumes and boxes with the commandments are tied to the foreheads of the ladies. The black servants politely lead every one away from Acosta, and the awe-inspiring rite of excommunication begins. Acosta protests and tries to justify himself. The young heroine, in a fit of ecstasy, throws herself on the neck of the accursed and publicly proclaims her love for him. This is sin, blasphemy. All remain petrified and then silently disperse. The scene is most impressive. But it was the director who did the actor's job.

It was the first time that the Russian stage saw such a mass scene in which everything was meant to create a theatrical sensation. One cannot describe what took place in the auditorium after this scene. Husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers, admirers and friends of the extras rushed to the footlights with cheers that grew into a roar, waved handkerchiefs and broke chairs, and forced the curtain to go up again and again to applaud the performers.

The second mass scene was staged altogether differently, and was meant to create an impression of another character. After the religious ceremony in the synagogue and public interrogation, Acosta mounts an elevation amidst the crowd to repudiate his ideas. First he stutters, then stops, and at last, no longer able to bear it, faints. He is lifted, revived and forced to go on with his renunciation in a semi-conscious state. Suddenly his brother, who pities him, cries out that his mother has died and that his bride has been plighted to another. Feeling that he is no longer constrained by love, the philosopher comes back to life, leaps to his full height and like Galileo shouts:

"But it turns around anyway!"

No matter how the crowd is held back from touching the accursed man–a sinful thing, according to religious belief,–the witnesses of Acosta's new blasphemy begin to maul him. Shreds of clothing fly in the air, Acosta falls, disappearing in the crowd, and rises again, dominating the mob and crying out his new blasphemy with all his strength.

From my own experience I know that it was dangerous to stand surrounded by the infuriated mob. This was the climax of the play, its highest culminating point. The crowd carried me on its waves without giving me time to make use of my spiritual buffers. It was thanks to the crowd, I think, that I played this scene well and achieved the highest point of tragic pathos.

It was altogether different in the third act where there was also a great tragic climax. But I had to create it alone, without outside help. Again, as I neared it, my spiritual buffers reached out, pushing back my creative goal and giving me no chance to approach it. Again inner doubts obstructed the course of impetus. Something seemed to be locked in my soul, and I could not move forward without looking back into the superconscious sphere of the tragic. I experienced the feelings of a bather who is about to dive into ice-cold water. I felt like a tenor without a high C.

The production of *Uriel Acosta* with its mass scenes à la Meiningen Players was a hit and attracted the attention of all Moscow. People began talking about us. For a time we seemed to have received a patent for mass scenes.

The Society's affairs began to look brighter. Its members and actors who were already despairing of the success of our enterprise, began to believe in it again and decided to remain in the Society.

PASSION FOR PRODUCTION TASKS

The Polish Jew

THE NEXT PRODUCTION of the Society of Art and Literature was *The Polish Jew,* a play by Erckmann and Chatrian.

There are plays which are interesting in themselves. But there are others which may be made interesting if the stage director approaches them in an original way. For instance, if I tell you the dry plot of *The Polish Jew,* it will bore you. But if I take the outline of the play and embroider it with all the possible designs of a stage director's imagination, the play will come to life and become interesting.

I had especially chosen this play not because I liked it in the original, but because I came to love it in that production which I had in my mind. And now I shall tell of it not as it is written, but as it was produced by the Society of Art and Literature.

Imagine the cosy home of a burgomaster of a border village in the hills of Alsace. The stove is burning, the lamp is bright, a Christmas supper is in progress. The company includes the burgomaster's daughter, her fiancé–an officer in the frontier guard, a forester and another highlander. Outside there is a snow-storm. The howling wind rattles the window panes, penetrates through the cracks and oppresses the soul. But the people in the room are happy; they sing hill songs, smoke, eat, drink and joke. One of the gusts of wind is so strong it frightens the people. They remember another similar snow-storm some years before that; they seemed to have heard the jingle of sleigh bells amidst the gusts of wind. Somebody was driving in the storm. A few minutes later, the bells rang very near, and stopped. The door swung open, and the tremendous figure of a man wrapped in a fur coat stood on the threshold.

"Peace be with you," said the new arrival.

He was one of those rich Polish Jews who often passed through that neighbourhood. Having removed his coat, he took off his belt and laid it on the table in such a manner that the gold hidden in it rang. After warming himself and waiting for the storm to stop, the Jew went away. Next day his horse and sleigh were found in the hills, but he had vanished completely.

The merry-makers, for the hundredth time perhaps, discuss this strange occurrence, and return to their wine and song. Then the burgomaster arrives. The merriment is renewed to the accompaniment of the gusty wind.

Suddenly there is the hardly audible sound of bells. Somebody is driving outside. A few minutes pass and the bells ring very near and then stop. The door swings open and, just like many years ago, on the threshold there appears a large figure wrapped in a fur coat.

"Peace be with you," the new-comer says. He removes his coat and lays a heavy money belt on the table. The belt rings. The company is petrified. The burgomaster faints.

The second act takes place in a large room in the burgomaster's house. It is the day of his daughter's wedding to the young officer of the frontier guard. Everyone has gone to the church, and one can hear the pealing of its bells. Only the burgomaster is at home; he is still ill from his fright. The bridegroom comes to see him. While they are talking, the burgomaster suddenly begins to listen to something. In the ringing of the church bells he seems to hear the thin, piercing, silvery sound of the sleigh bells. And truly, one seems to hear it. Perhaps it only seems so. No, it is really the sound of sleigh bells. And yet, there is no sound. In order to comfort the sick man, the officer assures him that the murderer will soon be found, that the police are on his tracks. Meanwhile, the family returns from the church, the guests come to the wedding, there is the notary, the bridesmaids, the musicians. The ceremony takes place. The guests congratulate the bridegroom, the bride and the burgomaster. The musicians begin to play. There is merriment and dancing. But clearer and clearer the sleigh bells are heard in harmony with the orchestra. They pierce the sound of the orchestra; they float wider and wider as if embracing all other sounds, and at last they are heard, sharp and painful, piercing one's head, ears and brain. The maddened burgomaster, wishing to drown the bells, pleads with the musicians to play louder. He rushes to the first woman he sees and begins to whirl with her in an insane dance. He sings together with the music, but the bells are stronger and stronger and more piercing. Everybody notices the burgomaster is behaving queerly, they have stopped dancing, they press themselves to the walls, while he still whirls in his mad dance.

The third act takes place in the attic. There is a slanting ceiling, a stairway from below behind a partition. In the back wall there are low shuttered windows almost on the level of the floor. Through the bars of the shutters one can see that it is night. There is a large bed in the centre of the background, between the windows. On the forestage there is furniture—a table, benches, a wardrobe, a stove, all with the back to the audience. It is dark. From below comes the merry sound of wedding songs, music, young, ringing voices, drunken cries. Many people mount the stairway, talking. They are taking up the burgomaster who is tired and wants to sleep. They say goodbye. They go away, and the pale, tortured burgomaster hurries to lock the door. Then he sits down exhausted and from below there comes the sound of dishes through which one, if he listens attentively, may discern the jingle of the ominous bells. Listening to that sound with grief and excitement, the burgomaster undresses to seek relief in sleep. He puts out the candle, but in the darkness there again begins a musical symphony of terrible sounds.

It is an hallucination of the ear, in which happy singing subtly passes into funereal harmony, the merry voices and exclamations of the young guests grow into the gloomy, deathlike voices of the drunkards, and the sounds of dishes and winecups at times are reminiscent of church bells. And through all these sounds, like the *leit-motif* of a symphony, there pierce, now torturingly and insistently, now triumphantly and threateningly, the fateful sleigh bells. When he hears them, the burgomaster groans in the darkness and mumbles inarticulately. It seems that he is tossing, for the bed squeaks and something falls, perhaps a chair that he has pushed. And now in the middle of the room, where the bed is, it seems to grow lighter; bluish-gray rays of light appear no one can tell from where. Imperceptibly this light grows stronger, then weaker. Gradually, to the accompaniment of the hallucinatory symphony, there appears a figure. The head of this figure is lowered and crowned with hanging white hair. Its hands are tied and when it moves them one hears the clanging of chains. Behind the ghostly figure there is a pillar with an inscription which cannot be read. One may think that it is a pillar of shame with a criminal chained to it. The light grows and becomes grayer and greener. It spreads along the back wall and becomes a gloomy background for black beings, for ghostly silhouettes who have placed themselves before the footlights, with their backs to the public. In the middle, where the table was, a large, plump man in a black cloak and a judge's hat sits on a raised platform. On either side of him there are several other such figures with hats that are not quite so big. To the right, where the cup board was, a long serpentlike figure in a black cloak is stretching towards the criminal, and to the left, where the stove was, with elbows on the cathedra, eyes covered by a hand, stands a motionless, sorrowful figure, the figure of the defence counsel, also in a black cloak and a legal cap.

The examination of the criminal takes place as if in a nightmare, in whispers, with always changing rhythm. The criminal lowers his head more and more. He refuses to answer, and now from the corner where hang the burgomaster's clothes, there appears a long, thin figure which seems to grow larger as it crawls along the wall and reaches the ceiling, then lowers itself above the criminal and stares at him. This is a hypnotist. Now the criminal is forced to raise his head, and the audience recognizes the tired, old, thin face, the face of the burgomaster. Under the influence of hypnosis, weeping and pausing, the burgomaster begins to give evidence in broken words. To the question of the prosecutor as to what he did with the murdered and robbed Polish Jew, the criminal refuses to answer. Then there rises a storm of nightmare sounds; the stage gradually darkens and a crimson glow appears behind the glass of the door which leads to the stairway. The burgomaster in his nightmare thinks it is a forge and runs to it in order to squeeze the tremendous body of the murdered Jew into the narrow opening of the fiery stove and destroy all the traces of his crime. For he has burned all that already, and with it his soul. All is embraced in darkness.

The scarlet rays of the rising sun are seen through the slits in the shutters and the merry and drunken cries of the wedding guests are heard from below. The guests ascend the stairway to wake the burgomaster, for it is already broad daylight. They knock at the door, but there is no answer. At first they laugh at this silence, and then knock again, but still there is no answer. The guests outside are surprised, then frightened. They break the glass, open the door, enter, and find the burgomaster dead.

The change of the room into a court room took place almost unnoticeably and created the impression of such a nightmare that at almost all of the performances nervous women left the theatre and sometimes even fainted. This made me proud of my invention.

But while the audience was frightened by the nightmare, I saw an altogether different picture. The amateur actors, among whom were very many respectable citizens and even an influential civil general, crawled in the darkness on all fours, hurrying to their places so as not to be caught by the light in their progress. Many of them, afraid of being late, would push each other from the rear. This was so funny that it would insist on occupying my mind before the last and culminating scene of the play. I would close my eyes and think, "So this is the stage! Here it is funny, and from the audience it is terrifying."

I like to create devilry in the theatre. I am happy when I find a piece of hokum which deceives the spectator. In the realm of the fantastic the stage can still do a great deal. Not even a half of what can be done has been done. I must confess that one of the reasons for the production was the hokum in the last act, which, it seemed to me, would be interesting on the stage. I was not mistaken. It was successful. There were curtain calls. For whom? For me. Why? For my stage direction or my acting? It pleased me to think that it was for the latter, and I thought that I must have played well indeed, and that I was a true tragedian, for this rôle was in the repertoire of such great tragedians as Henry Irving, Ludwig Barnay, Paul Mounet and others.

At present, looking back, I think that I did not play the part badly at all. The interest in the play and the rôle grew, but this interest was not created by the psychology and inner life of the human spirit of the rôle, but by the plot of the play itself. Who was the murderer? This was the puzzle which interested the spectator and demanded solution. There were also the climatic moments that tragedy requires; for instance, in the finale of the first act when the burgomaster faints; in the finale of the second act where the burgomaster dances madly; and in the third act, in the strongest moment of the hokum scene. But who had created these strong moments, the stage director or the actor? It was the stage director, of course, and the laurels were his rather than the actor's.

This experiment as a stage director helped me once more to learn how to aid the actor from the outside. Moreover, it taught me how to show vividly the plot of the play and its outward action. Often we see a play without clearly understanding the logic of events and their dependence on each other. And that is the very first thing which must be made clear in any play, because without it, it is hard to speak of the play's inner nature. But here there was a great fault which emanated from the actors. Our amateurs were not masters of speech, nor was I, and we were seriously criticized by connoisseurs who advised us to learn how to speak from the best actors of other theatres, but we were *instinctively afraid of something and reasoned as follows:*

"It is better to mumble than talk as other actors do. They either play with their words or take pleasure in running the whole gamut of their vocal register, or they declaim. Let someone teach us to speak simply, musically, nobly, beautifully, but without vocal acrobatics, actors' pathos and all the aspects of stage diction. We want the same thing in movement and action. Let them be humble and not completely expressive and scenic in the theatrical sense of the word, but then they are not false, and they are humanly simple. We hate the theatrical in the theatre, we love the scenic on the stage. That is a tremendous difference."

The Polish Jew convinced me to a certain degree that I was able to play if not tragedy itself, then something very close to it. Like a tenor without a high C, I was a tragedian without the highest note of tragedy. In moments of the highest tragedy I needed the help of the stage director, which I received in this production from the hokum scene.

And although I made no progress in this play, neither did I retrograde. The production helped me to consolidate the positions I had earlier won.

EXPERIMENTS WITH PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

IN MY QUEST for a helper in the theatre with whom I might share the reins of rule in the complex theatrical affairs and also in my quest for actors who might complement our troupe, I turned to professional actors and managers, and tried to stage several productions with them.

For instance, I took upon myself the production of Gogol's *The Inspector-General* at one of the summer theatres near Moscow.

Who does not know how *The Inspector-General* must be produced? Everything was in its place, the sofa, the chair and the smallest trifles. The rehearsal progressed so smoothly it seemed that the actors had played together hundreds of times. There was not a single intonation, not a single trait that was created by themselves, but all the stencils fixed once and forever, against which Gogol himself protested so vigorously in his well-known letter on the production of *The Inspector-General.* I deliberately did not stop the actors, and after the end of the first act paid them many compliments, and said that there was nothing left for me but to come to the performance and applaud, for the production was ready. But if they wanted to play the real Gogol as I understood him, then they should start from scratch. The actors insisted that they wanted my manner of production and I confidently took up the job.

"Then let us begin," I said, mounting the stage. "This sofa is at the left. Put it on the right. The exit is on the right. Put it in the centre. You began acting here, on the sofa? Go to the other side, start with the arm-chair."

It was in such manner that I talked to professional actors with all the despotism that was part of me then.

"Now we shall begin," I said, "and with new *mises-en-scène.*" But the confused actors, with long and surprised faces, did not know where they should sit down or go.

"And what next?" one asked, perplexed.

"And where do I go now?" wondered another.

"How am I to speak this line?" a third inquired, having lost all his aplomb and seemingly turned into a simple amateur.

I began to order the actors about exactly as I did amateurs. Of course they did not like it, but they obeyed, for they had lost all ground beneath their feet.

The performance was not successful, for the actors had no time to unlearn the old and to make the new their own. I had taught them nothing, though I did learn something from them. I found out personally the meaning of actors' intrigues, gossip, undermining and gibes. I also came to know that it is much easier to destroy the old than to create the new.

My first experience with professional actors was far from successful.

My second attempt was much better. One well-known manager, a man of much talent, intuition and experience, invited me to produce Hauptmann's *Hannele* in the huge Solodovnikov Theatre. This production was in preparation for the coronation of Nicholas II. The job was responsible, as not only Russians would come to see it, but foreigners also. This offered me the opportunity to become widely known, as well as to learn the working methods of the famous manager.

Perhaps he was the man I was seeking!

This took place during Lent, when actors from the provinces came to Moscow to get engagements for the following season. I was invited to take part in selecting players for the company. At the appointed hour I came to the given address and found myself in a store that had been left in a hurry by its ruined owner. Dirt, rubbish, paper, broken boxes and shelves, an old sofa with broken arms and back, several arm-chairs in the same condition, old advertisements of manufactured goods, a spiral stairway that led to a low attic with a dirty little window and a ceiling which I continually struck with my head, and a mass of old boxes. Here on some boxes sat the manager with his assistant. People came to them—poor, ragged, dirty people—to whom he spoke very familiarly.

"Come, show me your legs," the assistant said to a young girl. "Stand straight. Turn about."

The confused girl took off her coat in this unheated "kennel" and tried to look as stately as she could.

"Let's hear your voice. Sing."

"I'm a dramatic actress. I don't sing."

"Write her down for the rôle of a beggar," the manager decided.

"She could play a prostitute, too," his assistant said, writing her name down in the list of the asylum inmates.

The young actress nodded and walked out. They began calling in others, but I stopped them, closed the door and asked for an explanation.

"Pardon me," I began as tenderly and carefully as I could, "I can't go on with this work. Do you think one can occupy himself with art and aesthetics in a pigsty? Aesthetics has its demands which must be fulfilled even if very badly. Without this aesthetics ceases to be aesthetics. Cleanliness is the minimum requirement not only of aesthetics but of the most primitive cultured society. Tell them to sweep out this rubbish, wash the floors and the windows, heat the place, put a few cheap chairs and a simple table in the room and place an ink-well and a pen on the table, so that one might write on the table and not on the wall as you are doing now. When all this is done, I shall begin my work with enthusiasm, for it interests me, but now I cannot, because I am nauseated.

"And another condition. You are the director of an establishment which must enlighten society. And actors are your closest cultured assistants. Let us remember this and treat them not as if they were prostitutes and slaves but people who deserve the honour of being called actors. If what I have said has not insulted you, but has inspired you to the creation of a clean and a good piece of work, give me your hand and let us say good-bye until the next time. If you think that what I have said is an insult, let us part now."

I had not been mistaken in the manager. He was a sensitive and decent man. My words confused him. He slapped his forehead and said:

"What an old fool I am not to have understood this before!"

He embraced me, and we said good-bye.

When I came again, the place was heated and was spick-and-span. Both top and bottom were furnished like palace halls in an operetta. Luxurious curtains covered with theatrical designs, velvet and silken table-cloths, property vases made of pasteboard, a pasteboard clock on the table, carpets, water, glasses, ash-trays, and tea for the actors. The upper room was turned into a real office for the director. The actors, amazed by the change, hurried to remove their coats, bring themselves into order and behave in the manner they had learned to use when playing Spanish grandees. The *bon ton* of this parlour was of a peculiar sort. Nevertheless, I achieved my goal, and it was possible to talk to people in a human manner.

The work began to seethe; all were in good spirits, everything promised something new to the actors who had become tired and worn by the theatrical indecencies of the provinces. Apparently I was popular. It seemed that everyone wanted to show this in his relations with me. There was a whole week ahead before we could move into the theatre and we decided to rehearse in our temporary quarters. First of all I memorized the names and surnames of all the actors. Imagine the surprise of an extra or a third-rate actor, who in the decades that he had been on the stage had been treated like a slave and had heard only the words "listen here," when he was first called at a rehearsal by his proper name and surname. This was bribery on my part that no one could hold out against, and they addressed me with great politeness.

The rehearsals began according to methods that were new to all of them. This time, after the lesson I had learned with *The Inspector-General,* I was more careful and everything progressed well to the joy of the manager and myself. He showered me with compliments for my so-called ability in handling people. That ability lay in the fact that I treated them as I would anyone else.

A week passed. We moved to the Solodovnikov Theatre and were shocked by its dirt and coldness. The actors were forced to push past each other in the corridors, waiting for their entrances, and gossip because they had nothing else to do. The discipline deteriorated immediately, and we were sorry we had left the old store.

In order to save the situation a *coup d'état* was necessary. I called off one of the rehearsals, left the theatre and left word for the manager that I had meant all that I said on a similar occasion in the dirty store which was later turned into a palace. A few days passed, and I received an invitation to a rehearsal. The theatre was heated, cleaned, and washed. A good room furnished with opera properties had been prepared for me, and two foyers for the actors, one for the men and the other for the women. But, ingrained with theatrical habits, few actors thought it necessary to remove their hats. The backstage atmosphere seemingly poisoned them with awful stage habits and carelessness with which I struggled and which did not allow us to tackle the work with clean hands and open hearts.

Then I thought up another trick. One of the bits was played by an old and deserving actor who was once famous in the provinces. His character was the first in order of appearance. I approached him when no one was about and asked him to come to the rehearsal in a hat, rubbers, overcoat, with a stick in his hand, and to mumble his part, as this was done in some theatres. Then I asked him to let me, a young amateur, give him, an old actor, a severe scolding and order him to take off his coat, hat and rubbers, to rehearse in full tone, and to speak his lines without looking into the text.

The actor was intelligent and wise and agreed to do what I was asking. All was done as it had been planned. I reproved him very politely, but loudly, and with the consciousness of my right to do so. The actors very probably thought that if a young amateur allowed himself to speak in such a manner to an old and honoured member of the profession, he could do much more with unknown actors if they did not obey him.

What confused them most was that at the fifth rehearsal I demanded that they know their lines by heart and would not allow them to look at the text. At the next rehearsal they knew their parts.

After my second *coup d'état* it was possible to conduct the rehearsals in the theatre. Then the manager began to drink from joy, and to conduct himself with more freedom than was necessary. After that another drunk appeared. I suspected a third man of drinking. And again our work began to give backwards and downwards. I felt that a third *coup d'état* was necessary. One day I was forced to stop the rehearsal, excuse myself before the actors for a lost evening, and go home. A silent grievance is always mysterious and terrible. That same evening I sent the manager my resignation, stating categorically that in the existing conditions, that is, while he was drunk, I could not and would not do anything. I knew he was stuck. He had spent almost all his money on the new production, he had incurred debts and there was no one he could ask for help. I was told later that the manager used drugs and all the means known to medicine in order to stop his fit of drinking and bring himself into a state of respectability. Clean, shaven, perfumed, he came to see me and swore by all the saints that he would not drink again. I agreed to resume rehearsals in the evening.

Hannele depicts the life of beggars and prostitutes in an asylum. The author paints a forceful and truthful picture of naturalism. But with the second act the tone of the play changes completely. Naturalism passes into fantasy. Hannele, who was dying in the first act, says farewell to her body and life in the second act and passes into eternity, which is depicted on the stage. Her comrades, coarse and realistic beggars, become the shadows of themselves, tender, sweet, and kind. They treat her lovingly now. The dead girl becomes a fairy queen and rests in a glass coffin.

The rehearsal was to start with this scene, and I was racking my brain as to how I was to turn real people into shadows. The stage was not yet lighted, and from behind a piece of scenery fell a bright ray of bluish light, creating a mysterious atmosphere and only hinting at the presence of walls in the room. All the rest of the stage was drowned in darkness. The actors were coming for the rehearsal, meeting on the stage, talking, walking at times into the way of the ray, and their elongated shadows crept over the floor and across the walls and ceiling. When they moved, their bodies looked like silhouettes and their shadows ran, met, parted, met again, broke away from each other; all became confused, and they were lost amidst their shadows and looked like shadows themselves.

Eureka! I had it. All that remained to find out was where and how the light was situated, for often accidental lighting is impossible to repeat on the stage. Calling the electrician, I wrote everything down with him—the intensity of the light, the voltage of the bulb, and marked the place. Now I had to decide how the actors should play. But this was easy, for the lighting effect prompted all the rest. I taught the actors to speak and move like the figures in our sick-dreams or nightmares, when someone seems to whisper mysterious words in your ear—then a pause on a broken word, a long pause, and all shiver and breathe, then again a slow, broken, often accented speech in a rising and falling chromatic scale. Again a pause, a silence—an unexpected whisper—the slow, monotonous movement of the shadows of the crowd that stand on the floor, across the walls and ceiling. Then suddenly, the sharp sound of an opening door, the strong creaking of a hinge, the sharp unpleasant voice that one hears when one is in a fever.

"It's quite frosty outside!" the unpleasant voice of a beggar whines, sounding like a pain of the heart that pierces a man through and through. All comes to life and the shadows fly to all sides along the walls; all is in chaos as when your head whirls around. Then silence again falls, gradually, the shadows stop moving—there is a long, long pause. Then someone's soft, tearful half-whisper and half-moan:

"Hannele! Ha-a-anne-e-ele!"

The stronger chromatic lift of a sigh, and then the sharp chromatic fall of intonation, a helpless whisper:

"Hannele is dead!"

The crowd of shadows comes to life; one can hear girls sobbing softly and old women moaning.

At this moment, from the distance, from the very farthest dressing-room a tenor cries in his highest note:

"The-e-e-e-e-ey a-a-a-re bri-i-i-i-i-ing-ing the gla-a-a-a-ass co-o-o-o-offi-i-i-in!"

His voice trembles because someone is shaking him by the shoulders.

After several minutes of this far-away, hardly audible cry, that seems to come from some mysterious messenger, the shadows become restless and repeat the same sentence, stressing all the hissing and sonorous consonants, "They arrre brrrrringing the gggglasssss cofffffinnnnn."

This whistling and hissing which began softly, strengthened and thickened with the rising disorder in the crowd. Then it came nearer and nearer, while extras placed in the wings began to repeat the phrase again and again with the hissing and whistling of consonants. When they had carried this hissing to a *forte,* everybody would join in, including stage hands and some of the musicians who offered their help. The result was a grandiose hiss accompanied by the whirling of the shadows on the walls. Meanwhile, in the centre of the stage appeared a glass coffin brightly illuminated, in which lay Hannele in the costume of a fairy princess. The other Hannele remained on the forestage in the costume of a beggar and lay as motionless as a corpse. With the appearance of the coffin everything gradually calmed down into blissful contemplation. The slow movements of the shadows were resumed. There was a tremendous pause.

At this very moment, I don't know myself from where, someone's drunken bass voice said quietly, clearly and distinctly, without any pathos, like a reflex in a dream:

"They are bringing the glass coffin."

This unexpectedness frightened us. We shuddered as if electricity had passed through us. The manager, I, and several other sensitive people who sat in the theatre leapt up with fear and confusion. The manager was running towards me.

"What was it? What was it? It was the work of a genius. We must leave it in. We must repeat it!"

The manager and I mounted the stage to embrace the new genius who had created such a superhuman effect. This genius was the completely drunk assistant of the director. The poor fellow, who had heard that one could not drink while one worked with us, and understood that he had betrayed himself, ran out of the theatre in fright. And no matter how we tried to recreate the effect, no matter how much the manager gave him to drink, he was afraid to come on the stage drunk, and from that time on came to the theatre sober, which deprived him of the possibility of repeating his inspiring performance.

Despairing of him, the manager found a contrabass in a church choir. First we tried him sober. We were unsuccessful. We made him drunk. The sound was good, but he could not say the right words at the right moment, either being late or saying the wrong thing. Besides, the manager himself began to drink with him. Having noticed this, I resolutely protested against the genial touch. The manager agreed with me, but did not stop drinking, and said that he was sick. I pretended to believe that he was ill but I warned his family not to let him come to the theatre while he was "ill." It is said that the sick man roared that he was drinking for the sake of art and that no one but he had the genial touch.

"OTHELLO"

OUR NEXT PRODUCTION was *Othello*. But before I speak about it I should like to recall the impressions that influenced my decision to play this rôle. The impressions were deep and important for me, guiding me not only when I was playing the Moor, but also in all my future art activity.

Moscow was honoured by the arrival of the king of tragedians—the famous Tommaso Salvini (father). Almost all through Lent he and his troupe performed *Othello* at the Bolshoi Theatre.

At first Salvini left me quite cool. It seemed that he did not want to attract all the attention of the audience to himself in the very beginning of the play. If he had wanted to do so, he could have done it with one genial touch, as he did in the Senate scene immediately after. The beginning of this scene brought forth nothing new, except that I was able to examine Salvini's figure, costume and make-up. I cannot say that they were in any way remarkable. I did not like his costume at that time, nor later. Make-up? I don't think he had any on at all. There was the face of the man himself, and perhaps it was unnecessary to make it up. There were his large, pointed moustaches, his wig that looked too much like a wig, his figure, too large, too heavy, almost fat, great Eastern daggers that dangled at his waist and made him look stouter than he was, especially when he donned a Moorish cloak and hood. All of this was not very typical of the soldier Othello.

But—

Salvini approached the platform of the doges, thought a little while, concentrated himself and, unnoticed by any of us, captivated the entire audience of the Bolshoi Theatre. It seemed that he did this with a single gesture–that he stretched his hand without looking at the public, grasped all of us in his palm, and held us there as if we were ants or flies. He closed his fist, and we felt the breath of death; he opened it, and we knew the warmth of bliss. We were in his power, and we will remain in it all our lives, for ever. Now we understood *who* this genius was, *what* he was, and *what* we were to expect from him.

I shall not describe Salvini's performance in *Othello,* how he revealed all the wealth of the inner content of his rôle and gradually led us along the steps by which the Moor descends to the hell of jealousy. Theatrical literature has preserved many works which permit one to recreate this unusually simple and clear, wonderful and gigantic image–Salvini-Othello. I can only say that for me there was no doubt that Othello, as performed by Salvini, was a monument embodying some eternal law.

The poet once said that "one must create for all time, once and for ever." It was precisely how Salvini created: for all time, once and for ever.

But why was it that when I saw Salvini I remembered Rossi and the great Russian actors whom I had seen? I felt that all of them had something in common, something that I seemed to know very well, something that only very talented actors possess.

What was it?

I racked my brains, but could not find the answer.

And just like I watched Ludwig Cronegk and the Meiningen Players in the past, striving to learn how they behaved offstage, so was I eager to learn what Salvini did offstage, and therefore pestered everyone with questions about him.

Salvini's attitude to his artistic duties was touching. On the day of a performance he would be excited from the very morning, eat very little, and after lunch would retire and receive no guests. The performance would begin at 8 p.m., but Salvini was usually in the theatre at five, that is, three hours before the curtain went up. He would go to his dressing-room, remove his overcoat, and begin to walk about the stage. If anyone approached him he would talk a little, then leave his companion, sink into thought, stand in silence, and then lock himself in his dressing-room. After a while he would come out in his bathrobe or a make-up coat, and after wandering about the stage and trying his voice on some phrase, or rehearsing a gesture or a series of movements necessary for his rôle, he would again retire to his dressing-room, put the Moorish make-up on his face and paste his beard on. Having changed himself not only outwardly, but inwardly, he would walk out on the stage again, his footstep lighter and more sprightly than before. The stage hands as a rule began setting up the scenery at this hour and Salvini would talk to them.

Who knows, perhaps Salvini imagined then that he was among his soldiers, who were putting up barricades and fortifications against an enemy. His strong figure, his military bearing, his sharp eyes seemed to confirm this supposition. Again Salvini would retire to his dressing-room and come out in a wig and the under-robe of Othello, then with a girdle and scimitar, then with a turban on his head, and at last in the full costume of Othello. And with each of his entrances it seemed that Salvini not only made up his face and dressed his body, but also prepared his soul in a like manner, gradually establishing a perfect balance of character. He crept into the skin and body of Othello with the aid of some important preparatory toilet of his own artistic soul.

Such preparatory work before every performance was necessary for the genius after he had played the part of Othello many hundreds of times, after he had spent ten years in the preparation of that part alone. He confessed that it was only after the hundredth or two-hundredth performance that he understood what Othello was and how to play the part well.

These details about Salvini impressed me tremendously, and these impressions left their imprint on all my work.

After I had seen Salvini I never stopped dreaming of playing Othello. The craving to play the Moor became almost unbearable when I visited Venice. And I decided to play Othello as soon as possible.

In Venice my wife and I spent all our days visiting museums, searching for antique objects, sketching costumes from frescoes, buying brocades, embroidery and even furniture.

During our trip abroad we visited Paris and there was a chance meeting I should like to relate.

In one of the summer restaurants of Paris I met a handsome Arab in national costume and got introduced to him. In another half hour I was already dining my new friend in a private dining-room. Learning that I was interested in his costume, the Arab took off his upper garment and the designs of the costume. I learned several bodily poses which seemed characteristic to me. Then I studied the Arab's movements. Returning to my hotel, I stood half the night before a mirror, putting on sheets and towels in order to turn myself into an elegant Moor, learning to turn my head quickly, gesticulate and to make my body as graceful as that of a deer, practising a smooth, royal method of walking, and turning palms towards those who might speak to me.

After this meeting I pictured Othello as a cross between Salvini and my new friend, the handsome Arab.

As soon as I returned to Moscow I began to prepare for a production of *Othello.* But I was out of luck. One obstacle followed another. First of all my wife fell sick, and I had to give the rôle of Desdemona to another amateur actress, but she behaved badly, became too conceited and I was forced to take the rôle away from her.

"I'd rather spoil the production than allow actors' caprices in our good work," I said to myself.

It became necessary to entrust the rôle to a very nice young lady who looked the part, but who had never been on the stage.

"This one will at least work and obey," I reasoned with the despotism that was so characteristic of me then.

Although we were quite successful with the public, our Society was very poor, for our new enthusiasm, the luxury of props, ate up all our profits. At that time we did not even have enough money to hire a hall. Our rehearsals took place in my apartment, in the only room I could spare. We were cramped for space but that did not bother us.

"This is all for the better," I thought. "The atmosphere of our little circle will be all the purer for that."

The rehearsals took place every day, lasting till three or four in the morning. The rooms of my little apartment were filled with tobacco smoke. It was necessary to serve tea every day. This tired the servant. She grumbled. All these inconveniences and cares my sick wife and I bore without a murmur, to save our Society from falling apart.

To tell the truth, our circle was not strong enough to provide actors for all the parts in the play. There was no one to play Iago, although every man in the Society was tested. We were forced to invite an experienced actor from

As Othello (1896)

the outside. Like Desdemona, he suited his rôle only outwardly; he had a good face, an evil voice and evil eyes. But he was stiff to the verge of despair and was absolutely no mimic, which made his face altogether dead.

"We'll get out of this somehow," I said, not without the over-confidence of a stage director.

The play began with the far-off striking of a tower clock. These sounds, so banal now, created an impression in their time. They were followed by the distant splash of oars (we invented this sound also); there was a floating gondola that stopped on the stage, the clang of chains with which it was fastened to a painted Venetian pile, after which it gracefully rolled from side to side in the water. Othello and Iago began their scene sitting in the gondola, then they disembarked under the colonnade of the house which resembled the Palace of the Doges in Venice.

In the scene of Brabantio the entire house came to life, the casements opened, sleepy figures looked out of them, servants put on their armour as they came out, picked up their arms and ran in the wake of Desdemona's abductor. Some jumped into the gondola which was filled to overflow, and rowed under the bridge, others crossed the bridge on foot, returned for something they had forgotten, and ran out again. The abduction of the white aristocrat by the black-a-moor was given a tremendous meaning in our production.

"Imagine some Tatar or Persian stealing a young grand duchess from the palace of the grand duke. What would happen in Moscow?" one of my simple friends told me after seeing the play.

In the Senate, the Doge sat in his traditional seat, in a bonnet and a golden hat. All the Senators were in black hats, with wide strips of brocade across their shoulders, and tremendous buttons made of egg-sized jewels. All who were present at the meeting wore black masks. A curious feature of the production was this. Notwithstanding the foolishness of having strangers present at a night conclave, I could not resist putting in this detail, which I had noted down during my journey to Venice; it did not matter that it was not necessary in the play.

How did I present Othello's famous speech in the Senate? Badly. I simply told a story. At that time I did not recognize the artistic importance either of the word or of speech. The outer image was more important to me. My make-up was not good, but my figure seemed all right. Poisoned in Paris by my Oriental friend, I copied him. What is remarkable is that notwithstanding the fact that I was in a costume play, I did not fall victim to the enchantments of the opera baritone. For this I was obliged to Salvini's portrayal. The characteristics of the East built a wall between me and my former bad habits. I had made my own the suddenness of the movements of the Arab, his floating walk, his palm, to such a degree that often I was unable to control these movements even offstage. They came to me naturally. I will stress another detail of stage direction and hokum that was very typical of the time and that helped to cover the faults of the actors.

For instance, at the end of the scene in the Senate, the Senators have left, Othello, Desdemona and Brabantio also. There remained the servants who were putting out the torches, and Iago, hiding like a black rat in a corner. With only two dim lanterns in the hands of the servants there was almost complete darkness which gave Iago the chance to hide his dead face. At the same time his fine voice sounded in the darkness better than ever and seemed more threatening than it was. At one stroke I had killed two birds. I hid a fault and showed the best gift of the actor. The stage director helped the actor by hiding him.

In the scenes in Cyprus there was also a novelty for that time. Let us begin by saying that Cyprus is altogether different from Venice, although in the theatre they resemble each other. Cyprus is Turkey. It is inhabited not by Europeans, but by Turks. The extras in the mass scenes on Cyprus were dressed as Turks.

One must not forget that Othello had come to an island where a revolt had just been crushed. One spark, and the flames would rekindle. The Turks looked askance at the conquerors. The Venetians were not used to ceremonies; they were not restraining themselves and were conducting themselves as if they were at home. They were making merry and drinking in something that looked like a Turkish coffee-house, which was built on the forestage in the centre at the corner of two narrow Oriental streets disappearing in a background of hills. From the coffee-house there came the sad sounds of a zurna and other Oriental instruments–people were singing and dancing there; one could hear drunken voices. And the Turks walked in groups in the street, leering at the drunken Europeans, holding their knives ready in their bosoms.

Feeling this atmosphere, Iago concocted the plan for his intrigue in a much greater measure than it is usual to show on the stage. His aim was more than just starting a quarrel between the two officers who stood in his way. The problem was much greater; it was to make them responsible for a new revolt on the island. Iago knew that a single spark would be enough to touch off a new revolt. He exaggerated a fight between two drunkards into an event, sent Roderigo and ran himself to inform all in the streets of what had happened. And he achieved what he was after. Crowds of newly revolted Cypriots stole down the two streets to the coffee-house to attack the conquerors and destroy them. Scimitars, swords, sticks, glittered above their heads. The Venetians took their appointed battle positions on the forestage, their backs to the audience, and prepared for the attack. At last the two crowds attacked the Venetians from both sides, and the fight began. Othello sprung into the thick of it, with a great sword in his hand with which he seemed to cut the crowd in two. It was here, in the very pit of death, that one could appreciate his fighting qualities and his courage. And it was here that one could truly appreciate the satanic plotting of Iago.

It is not to be wondered at that the act of Cassio which caused this catastrophe should take on tremendous proportions in Othello's eyes. It is clear why his judgement was strict, his sentence severe. The plot of the play was unfolded by the stage director on a large scale. While he could, he helped the actor with his production.

Beginning with the third act no hokum on the part of the stage director was any longer possible. All the responsibility fell on the actor. But if I did not have enough of simple restraint and inner creativeness of image for the tragic scene in the third act of *Uriel Acosta* where it was necessary to show the inner struggle between conviction and emotion, between the philosopher and the lover–then where was I to get the much more difficult technique and ability for the rôle of Othello, where everything depended on mathematical sequence in the development of the feeling of jealousy, from calmness, through the almost unnoticeable birth of passion, to the very heights of jealousy? It was no easy matter to draw the line, showing development of jealousy–from Othello's childish trustfulness in the first act towards the moment when doubt arises and passion is born, and then via all the phases of its growth to its apogee, that is, to beastly madness. And then, when the innocence of the victim of that passion was proved beyond all doubt, to cast emotion from the heights to the depths, into the chasm of despair, into the pit of remorse.

All this, fool that I was, I hoped to accomplish with the aid of intuition alone. Of course I was able to achieve nothing more than tremendous strain on my spiritual and physical powers by trying to squeeze tragic emotion out of myself. In my vain struggle I even lost the little which I had gained in other rôles–which I had seemed to possess since the time of *Bitter Fate*. There was no restraint, no control of the temperament, no distribution of colour; there was only the strain of muscles, the over-exertion of voice and of the entire organism, and spiritual buffers that grew on all sides of me in self-defence from the problems which I had put before myself under the influence of Salvini's performance and the demands they made on me.

To be just, there were places that were not bad in the first half of the play. For instance, the first scene in the third act with Iago, in which the latter casts the first seed of doubt into Othello's soul; the scene with the handkerchief between Desdemona and Othello, and others. I had enough technique, voice, experience and ability for these scenes, but farther on, feeling my impotence, I thought only of violent effort and created muscular strain. Here was the same feeling of chaos in the emotions and thoughts, with which I became so well acquainted in the rôle of Pyotr in *Don't Live to Please Yourself.*

There could be no talk about systematic and gradual growth of emotion. The worst of all was the voice, a highly sensitive organ that cannot stand strain. Even at rehearsals it had given warning more than once. There was enough of it only for the first two acts, but later it would grow so hoarse that it was necessary to stop rehearsing for several days at a time while a doctor would try his best with it. Only here, when I came face to face with reality, did I begin to understand that for tragedy it was necessary to know something, to be able to do something, that otherwise it would be impossible to give even one performance. The whole secret was in the voice, I decided; it had been placed in my case for singing, and I was turning it to drama. There was some truth in this, for I could not force my voice out, and I flexed my diaphragm and my throat so that my voice could not reverberate. The rehearsals were stopped for a while. With the obstinacy that was part of me at that time, I began to sing again, and considering that I was experienced enough as a singer, I worked out my own system for the placing of the voice for the drama, and I must confess that I achieved some good results. It was not that my voice became more powerful, but it became easier for me to use it, and I could now play through not only one or two acts, but the whole play. This was an advance not only in the given rôle but also in my technique for the future.

The work that I did at that time was far beyond my strength. After a long rehearsal I was forced to lie down with a quickening heart, and I would choke as if I had asthma. The production became a torture, but I could not stop it because the expenses had grown very large and it was necessary to cover them if we did not want to ruin our whole Society, for there was no place where we could get funds. Besides, my vanity as an actor and stage director suffered. It was I who had insisted on the production, and who continued insisting on it when more experienced people tried to persuade me to drop it. Art was avenging itself: the theatre was teaching the obstinate and punishing him for his over-confidence. It was a useful lesson.

"No," I thought, lying in bed after a rehearsal with a beating heart and a choking throat, "this is not art. Salvini is old enough to be my father, but he is not sick after a performance, although he plays in the huge Bolshoi Theatre while I cannot even finish a rehearsal in a little room. And I haven't even enough voice and temperament for the little room. I am losing weight as if I were seriously ill. How will I ever play the part? Why the devil did I start it? No, it is not so pleasant to act in a tragedy as it seemed to me before."

Another failure! At the dress rehearsal in the most powerful part of the scene with Iago, I cut his hand with my dagger, blood flowed from his wound, and the rehearsal had to stop. What hurt me most was that, notwithstanding the deadliness of my play, the audience remained completely cold. Had my acting made a big impression and had I wounded another in the heat of my performance, it would have been said that I had played so naturally that I could not restrain my temperament. This is not good, but it is flattering for an actor to have an uncontrollable temperament. But I had coldbloodedly wounded a man; it was not my acting, it was human blood that had made the impression. This hurt. Besides, the untoward event pointed clearly to the absence of the necessary restraint. Rumours of the event floated about town, and the news got into the papers. This interested the public, and possibly led them to expect more than I could give them.

The production was not successful,[29] and even our beautiful and luxurious stage appointments did not help. They were but little noticed, perhaps because after *Uriel Acosta* scenic luxury became satiating, perhaps because luxurious appurtenances are good and necessary only when the most important things are present with them–the interpreters of Othello, Iago and Desdemona. These were completely absent, and the production seemed to have only one good result: it gave me a good object-lesson in my obstinacy, vanity, and ignorance of the fundamentals of art and its technique.

"Don't be too hasty about playing parts which you can only cope with at the end of your stage career."

I swore I would not play tragedy.

But–

A famous actor visited Moscow. He played Othello, and at his performances the public as well as the press had a good word to say about me in the same rôle. This was enough to set me dreaming again about Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and all other parts that were far beyond my strength in those days.

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Othello and Khristofor Petrosyan as Iago (1896)

There was still another reason that caused me to return to my old dreams. Ernesto Rossi himself came to one of the performances of *Othello*. The famous actor sat through the performance from the beginning to the end, applauded as the ethics of actors demanded, but did not come backstage, and asked, as an older man of a younger, that I come and see him. I was highly excited when I visited the great actor. He was a charming man, remarkably well bred, well read and well educated. Of course, he had understood everything at once, the idea of the production, the Turkish Cyprus, the hokum with the darkness for Iago, but all this did not surprise him or make him enthusiastic. He was against the colourful scenery, the costumes and the production itself, for it took too much of the attention of the spectator away from the actors.

"All these playthings are necessary when there are no actors. A beautiful, wide costume can well cover a pitiful body within which there does not beat the heart of an artiste. It is necessary for those without talent, but you do not need it," Rossi sweetened the bitter pill he was preparing for me in a beautiful manner, with wonderful diction and movements of the hands. "Iago is not an actor of your theatre," he continued. "Desdemona *e bella** but it is too early to judge her, for she has probably just begun her stage career. That leaves you."

The great actor fell into a brown study.

"God gave you everything for the stage, for Othello, for the whole repertoire of Shakespeare. (My heart leaped at his words.) The matter is in your own hands. All you need is art. It will come, of course. . . ."

Having said the real truth, he began to embroider it with compliments.

"But where and how and from whom am I to learn that art?" I asked.

"Hm! If there is no great master near you whom you can trust, I can recommend you only one teacher," answered the great artist.

"Who is he?" I demanded.

"You yourself," he ended with the gesture he had made familiar in the rôle of Kean.

I was disappointed by the fact that in spite of all the cues I had given him, he had said nothing to me about my interpretation of the part. But later when I began to judge myself with less prejudice, I understood that Rossi could not have said anything else. Not only he, but even I did not understand my interpretation of the rôle—what in it was mine and what was the great Salvini's. It all boiled down to finishing the performance without breaking down, to squeezing tragism out of myself, to creating some sort of impression on the spectators, to being successful, to not failing scandalously. Can one expect a singer who yells at the top of his voice to give the most delicate nuances in his singing and to interpret artistically the songs and arias he is rendering. Everything is done uniformly, everything takes on one hue. Just like painters who smear a fence one given colour. How far removed they are from the artist who can blend his colours and lines exquisitely to express his superconscious feelings! I was just as far removed from the artist who can show a crowd his own interpretation of a character confidently and calmly. For this it is not enough to be simply talented and to have natural gifts; one needs ability, technique and art. It was this that Rossi had told me, and he could not have told me anything else. Experience told me the same thing.

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* Is beautiful. (Ital.)

But the chief thing was that I began to realize how far I was from being a tragedian, and especially from Salvini.

A CASTLE IN TURIN

AFTER I HAD BURNED my fingers in *Othello,* I was afraid of tackling tragedy, and it was boring to live without Spanish boots and medieval swords. So I decided to try my mettle in comedy. This motivated the production of *Much Ado About Nothing.*

And yet there was still another reason. Let me confess it.

During our visit to Italy, my wife and I had accidentally come upon the medieval gates of a castle in the park of Turin. It had been built for an exhibition and was patterned after medieval castles. A bridge was noisily lowered for us across a water-filled moat, the creaking gates were opened, and we found ourselves in a little feudal town. Narrow streets, houses with colonnades under the hanging roof of which passed pedestrians, a square, an original cathedral, alleys with pools, the tremendous castle of the lord himself surrounded by its own moat and having its own suspension bridge. The entire town was painted up with bright Italian frescoes. Near the entrance gates were armed soldiers, towers with stairways, entrances, and apertures for guns and arquebuses. The entire town was closed in by a toothed wall which was patrolled by a sentry. Crowds of people walked about the town—citizens, pages, merchants, who live permanently in this fantastic town and always wear medieval costumes. Butcheries, vegetable and fruit shops stretch along all the streets, and above, from the windows of some courtier, in the sultry air of the street, hang medieval breeches and doublet. Passing an armourer's shop you are deafened by the beating of a hammer, and the hot breath of fire singes you. A gloomy priest passes, accompanied by a barefooted friar who is girded by a rope and has a shaven poll. A street singer intones a serenade. A woman of doubtful appearance invites you into a medieval hostelry, where a whole ram is being roasted on a spit in a tremendous fireplace.

"The castle is empty, for the duke and his family are away," we were told by the commandant.

Here are his barracks, here is a small kitchen for the soldiers, a large kitchen for the lord, with a whole steer on the spit hung under the ceiling and waiting to be lowered into the fire of the tremendous hearth. Here is the dining-room with the two-seated throne of the lord and his lady, with boards resting on horses instead of tables; here is the inner courtyard from where one can see the hunting falcons.

We were in the throne room with portraits of the ancestors of the lord hanging on the walls, with writings of an ethical nature in the shape of long white tongues seemingly issuing from mouths. In the bedchamber is a large sacred image. It opens like a door and leads into a narrow corridor; from the corridor you enter a tower–a round room with a tremendous bed with hangings, the cold stone walls draped with ribbons, flowers, writings, scrolls of multicoloured papyrus. Here hang breeches, a sword, a cloak. It is the dwelling-place of a page. We entered the chapel, we spent some time in the cell of the priest.

After this I began to understand the meaning in Shakespeare's plays of "Send for the priest" and how he was able to appear in a moment and raise his hands in blessing. This was because the priest lived in the same house. And if you pass the corridor and enter the chapel, why, you can be married in a moment. He who has been in this castle has felt the spirit of the Middle Ages.

I decided to live for a time in the feudal town and to gather impressions of the Middle Ages at first hand. It was a pity that strangers were not allowed to spend the night there, and we remained until we were asked to leave before the main gates were closed.

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Benedick and Maria Lilina as Margaret in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1897)

Drunk with what I had seen, I began to look for a play in order to use this excellent material for a production. I did not need scenery and costumes for a play; I needed a play for the scenery and costumes. It was with this purpose that I thumbed the pages of Shakespeare, and it seemed to me that my ideas of production were best of all fitted for *Much Ado About Nothing.* There was only one thing I had not thought of—whether or not I suited the rôle of a happy-go-lucky, witty merry-maker. I began to think of that only after the rehearsals had already begun.

"One can make two Benedicks out of you," someone told me, "but never one."

How could I squeeze into that rôle when I was too big for it? After long tortures it seemed that I had found a way out that was not bad, or rather that was a compromise. I decided to play a clumsy knight, a soldier who must think only of service and hate all women, especially Beatrice. He deliberately insults her. I hoped to find in outer military coarseness the character of the image. I had already come to love to hide myself behind a character, but it was a pity that I could not find the character, and for this reason fell again into the quicksands of my old opera habits, a thing that always happened to me when I did not play a part but myself.

From the view-point of stage direction I was much more successful. The play found a good home in my medieval castle. I also felt at home in it, I understood everything in it. For instance, where did the visiting duke Don John and his courtiers intrigue? Right here in the feudal town in one of whose houses they stopped. Where did Borachio and Conrade meet? Why, in the narrow streets of the feudal town. Where were they led? Into the alley near the barracks where Dogberry held court. Where was Claudio wedded? Where did the scandal during the ceremony take place? In the chapel of the castle. Where did Benedick go to challenge Claudio to a duel? To the same house where Don John lived. Where did the masquerade take place? In the inner courtyard, in the narrow corridors, in the throne room, in the dining-room. All was clear, natural, cosy, close at hand, just as it was in the Middle Ages.

At that time I thought that the stage director must study and feel the local character of the life, of a part and of a play in order to show it to the spectator and force the latter to live in that locale as he lived at home. With time I learned the true meaning of so-called realism.

"Realism ends where the superconscious begins."

Without realism, at times bordering on naturalism, one cannot penetrate into the sphere of the superconscious. If the body does not heal, the soul will not believe. But more of that in its own good time. Meanwhile it is enough that I understood the necessity of visiting museums, travelling, collecting books that are necessary for productions, engravings, paintings, and all that pictures the outer life of men and simultaneously characterizes their inner life. Till that time I loved to collect in all spheres, but from that moment on I began to gather things that bore relation to the theatre and to the business of the stage director.

The usefulness of this production lay also in the fact that I had again realized the importance of characterization in defending myself from harmful, theatrical methods of acting. I thought that the creative road led from outer image to inner emotion. As I learned later, this was one of the roads, but not the only one. It was good when characterization came of itself and I grasped my rôle immediately. But in the majority of cases this did not happen, and I would remain helpless. How was I to make it my own? I thought much and laboured much over this problem, and this was useful, since in my search for characterization I looked for it in real life. I began, as Shchepkin bequeathed, to "seek examples in life" and when I found them, tried to carry them on to the stage. Before this, in my quest for the methods of acting in a given rôle, I only buried myself in the dust-covered archives of old and lifeless traditions and stencils. In those spiritual warehouses one cannot find inspiration for creativeness and intuition. And it is especially there that most actors seek stimulants for their inspiration.

The production was very successful–due mostly to the stage direction. As an actor I appealed only to nice and kind high-school girls.[30]

"THE SUNKEN BELL"

WHEN HAUPTMANN'S *Sunken Bell* appeared on the theatrical horizon, our Society of Art and Literature was the first in Moscow to produce this lyrico-tragical fairy-tale in which, along with a great deal of philosophy, there is also much of the fantastic. The old woman Wittichen is something of a witch. Her golden-haired grand-daughter Rautendelein, the beautiful child of the hills, is the dream of the poet, the muse of the artist and sculptor, who dances under the rays of the sun and weeps over a brook. Her counsellor and friend is the philosophic Water Sprite, who snorts like a walrus, wiping his face with webbed paws that look like fish fins, and in important cases always pronounces his deep-meaning "Bre-ke-ke-kex." The Wood Sprite with the beast's face, in a furry skin with a tail, leaps from stone to stone or down the precipice, climbs trees and knows all the news and the gossip which he communicates to his friend the Water Sprite. A crowd of beautiful young elves appear dancing in a ring under the moon, like our Russian mermaids. Little animals that resemble rats and moles crawl from everywhere at Wittichen's call to feed on the remnants of her food.

There is also a cliff with a cavern in which Wittichen lives, and a small platform covered with fallen stones where Rautendelein dances and warms herself in the sun, and a mountain lake with murmuring waters out of which the Water Sprite appears, and a tree that has fallen across the brook, on which the Wood Sprite nimbly balances himself, and an endless amount of platforms that extend in all directions, up and down to the trapdoors, giving a chaotic appearance to the floor.

Into this fantastic Devil's Dell falls Master Heinrich, whose part I played. My appearance, rather cleverly planned, made a big impression. I rolled head downwards along a smoothly polished board that was placed at an angle to a high platform in the wings. This board was masked as a side of the cliff. Together with me there descended an avalanche of stones, small trees, branches, whose pasteboard noise was drowned in the terrible crash which we were able to produce by combining various sounds in the wings.

Rautendelein dug me out of the mass of rocks. For both of them it was love at first sight. Heinrich, fully recovering his senses, tells breathlessly of the disaster that has overtaken him, that he had wanted to cast a tremendous bell (an idea, a religion) which would ring out to all the world and tell it of happiness. But the bell was too heavy, and when men began to hoist it up, it fell down, destroying everything in its path, and its creator Heinrich fell with it. Night descends with all the little sounds of the hills, and the far echo of human voices. A pastor, a teacher and a villager are out, searching for the great master, but the Wood Sprite, whose howl echoes ominously in the hills, has tricked them off the road and leads them to the Devil's Dell. The howling of the Wood Sprite and the human voices come nearer and nearer while there is a long pause on the stage. At that time this was a novelty that was much spoken of.

Down below in the trap, as if far away in the valley, appear the lights of lanterns, dots of light that become larger and larger before spectator's eyes as they approach. Now, the Wood Sprite leaps from stone to stone down the high cliff to the brook, runs across the fallen tree, leaps to a high platform, then to another, and howling, disappears from the stage while his voice dies out in the distance. Meanwhile, people emerge from the trap, and they are also forced to move along with the help of gymnastics, to climb over cliffs, rising and descending again, or disappearing in the trap in order to rise from it in another place, squeezing in between two cliff sides, and at last crossing the rippling brook in the darkness.

Seeing the red light in Wittichen's cavern, the pastor commands her in the name of God to come out. And from the cavern, preceding Wittichen, crawls a threatening shadow and after it Wittichen herself, with a stick, illuminated by a mysterious red light. At the demand of the pastor she shows him Heinrich who lies at her feet. The people carry him back to the valley. A fog descends. In its formless clouds there appear hazy silhouettes of creatures who slept under the stones and who are now awake. These are elves who weep for the fate of the popular hero Baldur. But someone shouts that he is alive and, filled with new hope for the future, they circle in an endless dance, rising to the cliffs and coming down from the heights to the accompaniment of wild cries, howls, whistling and a full orchestra of the sounds of the hills.

Heinrich is carried home to his wife who is terribly grief-stricken. He lies dying in his bed while his wife runs for help. Into the empty house comes Rautendelein, dressed as a peasant woman. She runs into the open door of the kitchen which is soon illuminated by the red light of the hearth. Rautendelein's shadow is seen moving in the kitchen, now and then there are glimpses of herself running past the door with loose golden hair which makes her look like a beautiful witch. With short, animal-like movements she swiftly looks into the sick-room, at the face of the sick man, and runs back to the kitchen to finish preparing a magic potion. At last she gives it to the sick man, cures him and takes him to the hills. There Heinrich dreams again of doing something great and superhuman.

At last Heinrich makes a smithy, and gnomes and all sorts of unclean beings are hired to toil over an unheard-of human bell. Spurred on by Heinrich's red-hot iron staff and bending low under heavy loads, hunchbacked, cross-eyed, crooked and deformed creatures carry up and down tremendous metal parts which are forged in the hellish smithy. The red-hot masses of metal, black, sooty smoke, the forge, red as hell itself, tremendous bellows which emits sparks of fire, the terrible ringing blows of the hammer against melted silver, the noise of falling masses of the metal, the cries of Heinrich–all create on the stage a hellish factory. The bell is already moulded and soon its long-expected peal will be heard throughout the world. And it rings out with such terrible power that human ears and nerves cannot bear the elemental sound. Man is not able to conceive that which is only open to superhumans and gods. Again Heinrich falls and Rautendelein remains grief-stricken with a crowd of sad elves, who weep for the lost hero and for the dream that will never be realized on earth.

The material given by the poet in the play is rich enough for any stage director's fantasy. I must confess that at the time the play was produced, I had already learned to make use of the floor of the stage; talking in modern language I was an experienced *constructor*. I will try to explain what I mean.

The frame of the opening of the stage plus the floor of the stage create three dimensions, height, width and depth. The artist draws sketches on paper or canvas that have only two dimensions and often forgets the depth of the floor of the stage, that is, the third dimension. Of course, in his drawing he expresses it in perspective, but he does not consider the measurements of the stage. Transferring the flat sketch to the boards, the forestage shows a tremendous space of theatrical, dirty, flat and empty floor. The stage begins to resemble a simple concert platform on which one can stand before the footlights and declaim and move, and express one's sentiments as far as one's vertical standing body would allow one. Such a position greatly limits the scale of plastic pose, movements and actions. Because of this, the interpretation of the spiritual life of the rôle becomes weaker. It is hard to convey standing what has to be conveyed sitting or lying down. And the stage director, who could in this sense help the actor with his *mise-en-scène* and grouping, is also half-bound by the mistakes of the artist, who has substituted boresome, flat and dirty boards for the sculptural shaping of the floor. In such conditions the actor must fill with himself all the stage, place in himself alone the entire play and only with the help of emotion, mimicry and sharply limited plastics, bare the subtle and complex soul of a Hamlet, a Lear or a Macbeth. It is hard to hold the attention of a crowd of a thousand spectators.

Oh, if there were actors who could fulfil the simple *mise-en-scène* of standing near the prompter's box! How it would simplify the business of the theatre. But–there are no such actors in the world. I watched the greatest actors to see for how many minutes, standing on the forestage before the footlights, without any outside help, they could hold the attention of the audience. I also watched how variegated their poses, movements and mimicry were. Practice showed me that the maximum of their ability to hold the attention of a crowd in a strong and impressive scene is *seven minutes*. This is tremendous! The minimum, during an ordinary scene, is *one minute*. This is also much! After that, they no longer have the variety of expressive means. They are forced to repeat themselves, and that weakens attention, until the next passage which calls for new methods of interpretation and renews the attention of the spectator.

Mark you, this happens with a genius. Then what happens with ordinary actors, with their home-bred methods of play, with their round, flat pancake of a face, with arms that do not bend, with a body that is petrified with strain, with feet that do not stand but stamp in one place? Can they hold the attention of the spectator long? And it is they who love more than anyone else to stand on the forestage with a dead, inexpressive face, and a body that is simply exhibited. It is they who try to be as near the prompter as they can. They claim the right to fill the whole stage with themselves and to hold all the attention of the audience all of the time. But they never succeed. This is why they are so *nervous*, and twist like eels, afraid that the public may grow bored. More than anyone else they must appeal to the stage director and the artist and beg that the constructor prepare for them a comfortable floor which might help them, together with the aid of the director and the artist, to interpret those spiritual subtleties of a rôle which they cannot interpret themselves with their home-bred methods. Sculptural shapes would help them—if not to reveal emotions in all poses—at least to convey plastically the inner image they had formed, and successful *mises-en-scène* and groupings would create an appropiate atmosphere. What is it to me, an actor, that behind me hangs a drop curtain painted by a famous artist? I don't see it, it does not inspire me, it does not help me. Just the opposite; it only obliges me to be as interesting as the wonderful backdrop against which I am standing and which I do not see. Often it only interferes with me, for I have not agreed with the artist beforehand, and in most cases we pull in different directions. Better give me one good arm-chair around which I will find an endless number of ways to express my emotions. Or give me a stone on which I may sit down to dream or lie in despair or stand high in order to be closer to the sky. These palpable objects seen by us on the stage are much more necessary and important for us actors than colourful canvases that we do not see. Sculptural things live with us and we with them, while painted backdrops live separately from us.

The Sunken Bell gave tremendous possibilities to the director-constructor. Judge for yourself. The first act—hills, chaos, stones, cliffs, trees and waters where all the unclean creatures of the fairy-tale abide. I prepared such a floor for the actors on which they could not walk at all.

"Let them creep," I thought, "or sit on stones; let them leap on the cliffs or balance and climb the trees; let them descend into the trap and climb up again. This will force them, and myself among them, to get used to a new *mise-en-scène,* and to play in a way that is new to the stage, without standing near the footlights."

There was no place for triumphal operatic processions, no reason to raise arms. There were just a few stones on which to stand or sit. My scheme worked. As a stage director I not only aided the actor but called forth against his will new gestures and methods of play. How many parts gained from this *mise-en-scène!* The leaping Wood Sprite who was played excellently by Georgy Burdzhalov, the swimming and diving Water Sprite, played beautifully by Vasily Luzhsky and Alexander Sanin, Rautendelein (Maria Andreyeva[31]) leaping along the cliffs, elves born of the mist, Wittichen squeezing through the cleft in the hills, all this by itself made the rôles characteristic and colourful and awoke the imagination of the actor. Justice demands recognition that this time I made a great step forward as a stage director.

As far as my acting was concerned, it was an altogether different story. *All that I could not do, all that I should not do, all that of which I was* deprived by nature made the chief substance of my rôle as Heinrich. Lyricism in that sweet effeminate sentimental way in which I then falsely understood it, romanticism which neither I nor any actor outside of a real genius could express simply, meaningfully and nobly, and at last pathos in dramatic places in which my stage director's hokum did not help me, as it did in *Uriel Acosta* and *The Polish Jew*–all this was far above my strength and my ability. We know now that when an actor wants to do something that is impossible for him to do, he falls into the same old trap of outer mechanical stencils, for the stage stencil is the fruit of artistic impotence. In this rôle, with moments of great climax, I learned more strongly and clearly, more coarsely and stagily and confidently to stencil all that was beyond me and what I had not yet achieved. New harm from not understanding my true *emploi,* a new stop in the development of my art, a new violation of my nature.

But–

Admirers who always interfere with the correct self-appraisal of an actor again rooted me in my mistake. True, many friends, whose opinion I valued, kept a sad and meaningful silence. But this only made me yield more to flattery, for I was afraid to lose faith in myself. And again I light-mindedly explained their silence by jealousy or intrigue. But nevertheless there was a gnawing pain inside which caused dissatisfaction. Let me say in my defence that it was not the self-love of a spoiled actor that made me so self-confident. Just the opposite–continual secret doubt of myself, panicky fear of losing faith in myself, without which I would not have courage enough to go out on the stage and meet the audience face to face–this is what compelled me to force myself to believe that I was successful. The majority of actors are afraid of the truth not because they cannot bear it, but because it can break the actor's faith in himself.

The play was crowned with extraordinary success. It was given not only in the club, but later in the Art Theatre itself.

A MEMORABLE MEETING

SOME DAY, perhaps, Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko himself will describe how he came to the Moscow Art Theatre.[32] Here I shall just mention that already then he was a well-known dramatist and that some people saw in him Ostrovsky's successor. To judge from the way he shows actors what to do at rehearsals, he is a born actor and it seems some accident that he has not specialized in this profession. Apart from writing plays, he was for years director of the Moscow Philharmonic School and trained many young Russian actors for the imperial, private and provincial theatres. The 1898 graduating class was the most successful ever–it was a complete company that seemed to have been handpicked. True, some were more talented than others, but they all grew up under the same star and cherished their teacher's behests and ideals. Several had extraordinarily artistic individualities, which are so rare. The graduating pupils included Olga Knipper (later Anton Chekhov's wife), Margarita Savitskaya, Vsevolod Meierhold, Yekaterina Munt and Boris Snegirev. Wouldn't it be a pity if this chance-formed company were to disperse all over Russia, just like many of Nemirovich-Danchenko's promising pupils had done before?

Like me, he saw no hope for the theatre as it was at the end of the 19th century–a theatre in which the brilliant traditions of the past had degenerated into a simple though skilful technical method of playing. I do not mean, of course, the outstandingly gifted players who then shone in the leading city and provincial theatres. Thanks to the theatrical schools the actors on the whole were at a much higher intellectual level than ever before. But there were few real talents "by the grace of God"; the theatres in those days were in the hands of bartenders and bureaucrats. How could one expect the theatre to prosper in such conditions?

Dreaming of a new theatre, looking for suitable people to help us create it, we had sought each other for a long time. It was easier for Nemirovich-Danchenko to find me, for as an actor, stage director and director of an amateur circle I constantly appeared in public. His school's performances, on the other hand, were rare; most of them, moreover, were private affairs which not everyone could attend.

That is why he found me first and invited me. In June 1897, I received a note asking me to come for a talk in the restaurant "The Slavic Bazaar." We met, and he explained to me the purposes of our meeting. They lay in the establishment of a new theatre, which I was to enter with my group of amateurs, and he with his group of pupils. To this nucleus we were to add his former pupils, Ivan Moskvin and Maria Roksanova, and other actors from Petersburg, Moscow and the provinces. The most important questions before us were these: how far the artistic principles of the chief directors of the new theatre agreed with each other, what compromises each of them was willing to make, and were there any points in common between us.

International conferences do not consider the world questions before them so closely as we considered the foundation of our future enterprise, the questions of pure art, our artistic ideals, scenic ethics, technique, the plans of organization, our future repertoire, and our mutual relations.

"Take actor A," we would test each other. "Do you consider him talented?"

"To a high degree."

"Will you take him into the troupe?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because he has adapted himself to his career, his talents to the demands of the public, his character to the caprices of the manager, and all of himself to theatrical cheapness. A man who is so poisoned cannot be cured."

"And what do you say about actress B?"

"She is a good actress, but not for us."

"Why?"

"She does not love art, but herself in art."

"And actress C?"

"She won't do. She is incurably given to hokum."

"What about actor D?"

"We should bear him in mind."

"Why?"

"He has ideals for which he is fighting. He is not at peace with present conditions. He is a man of ideas."

"I am of the same opinion. With your permission I shall enter his name in the lists of our candidates."

Then there arose the question of literature. I felt Nemirovich-Danchenko's superiority at once, and willingly subordinated myself to him writing down in the minutes of the meeting that he was to have full power of veto in all questions of literary character.

But in the sphere of acting, directing and producing I would not yield so easily. I had a serious shortcoming, which I believe I have more or less overcome by now. Once I became enthused about something, I went after it without letting any obstacle hinder me. At such a moment neither rhyme nor reason could stop me. That, apparently, was a consequence of my stubbornness in childhood. I was quite experienced in matters of stage direction at that time, and Nemirovich-Danchenko felt compelled to yield me the right of veto in matters of stage direction and artistic production. In the minutes I entered:

"The literary veto belongs to Nemirovich-Danchenko, the artistic veto to Stanislavsky."

All through the years we abided by this clause of our agreement. One of us would only have to utter the magic word *veto,* and our debate would end there and then, the entire responsibility being placed on the shoulders of the one who exercised his right. Of course, we used our power of ultimatum very carefully, and exercised it only in extreme cases, when we were fully convinced that we were in the right. There were mistakes, too, but each of us had the opportunity to begin and finish his work without any interference. Others, who were less experienced, watched us, and learned what they had not understood at first.

In matters of organization I willingly yielded the right of decision to my new comrade, for I saw only too plainly his administrative abilities. In the business affairs of the theatre I limited myself to an advisory capacity at such times when my business experience could be of use.

The question of finances was also considered at the meeting in "The Slavic Bazaar." It was decided to offer shares to the directors of the Philharmonic Society among whom there were many well-to-do men, and also to the members of the Society of Art and Literature. My financial contribution was very modest because the debts incurred by the Society had badly shaken my position.

In the field of general ethics we immediately agreed that before we demanded the fulfilment of all the laws of decency on the part of the actors, it was necessary to place them in human surroundings. Remember in what conditions actors usually live, especially in the provinces. Often they have not a single corner behind the scenes that they can call their own. Three-quarters of the theatre is usually given over to the spectators, who have buffets, tea-rooms, coat-rooms, foyers, smoking-rooms, toilets with hot running water, corridors for promenades. Only one-quarter of the building is given over to the people who work in the theatre. Here there are store-rooms for scenery, for properties, for electric appliances, offices and work-rooms. What space is there left for the actor? Several tiny rooms under the stage, more like stalls than anything else, without windows or ventilation, always dusty and dirty because no matter how much they are cleaned, the dust from the stage floor which forms the ceiling of these rooms always eats through the cracks between the boards, dust that is permeated with dry paint from the scenery, which injures the eyes and the lungs. Remember the furnishings of these so-called dressing-rooms—they are no better than those in a prison cell: several badly planed boards fastened to the wall by means of T-irons, that were supposed to be make-up tables; a little mirror intended for the use of at least two or three actors, usually crooked; an old rickety chair that can no longer be used in the stalls; a wooden plank with nails in it instead of a hanger; a wooden door with cracks in the panels; a nail and a rope instead of a lock; and often indecent inscriptions on the walls.

If you look into the kennel of the prompter you are reminded of medieval inquisition. The prompter in the theatre is sentenced to eternal torture that makes one fear for his life. He has a dirty box lined with dusty felt. Half of his body is beneath the floor of the stage in the dampness of a cellar, the other half, at the level of the stage, is heated by the powerful footlights on both sides of him. All the dust raised by the curtain or the sweeping dresses of the actresses fills his mouth. And he is forced to speak without stopping during performances and rehearsals in an unnatural and often strained voice so that he may be heard by the actors alone, and not by the spectators. It is a well-known fact that three-quarters of the prompters end up with tuberculosis.

Everybody knows this, but no one tries to invent a more or less decent prompter's box, notwithstanding the fact that our age is so rich in invention.

The stage and the dressing-rooms, included in the general heating system of the theatre, are usually kept warm only in so far as this is demanded by the needs of the spectator. The temperature of the dressing-rooms is directly dependent on the temperature in the auditorium. Therefore, in most cases actors either freeze in their summer clothes or tights necessary for their parts, or, when the theatre is heated, are brought to a point of fainting in the heavy fur coats which they put on in plays like *Tsar Fyodor.* During rehearsals theatres are usually completely unheated. They become colder and colder, what with the carrying in and out of scenery. The tremendous doors that lead from the stage to the street are opened for hours at a time while the stage hands finish their work. Usually they interfere with the beginning of rehearsals and the actors are forced to breathe frozen air which attacks them every time the door is opened. Naturally actors have to rehearse in their overcoats and rubbers and so bring the mud of the street on the stage. Because there is no place where they can rest between appearances on the stage, they are obliged to wander in dusty wings, in the cold corridors, in the uncomfortable dressing-rooms. Continuous smoking, cold food, sausage, herring, ham laid out on a newspaper spread on the actor's knees, gossip, vulgar flirting, scandals, anecdotes—all this is the natural consequence of the inhuman conditions in which the players find themselves, conditions in which these art workers spend three-quarters of their life.

We discussed all this and decided at that memorable meeting of ours that the first money we collected for reconditioning the theatre should be spent to create decent conditions for creative life. Each actor should have his own dressing-room, even though it be no bigger than a ship's cabin, done and decorated to suit the taste of its occupant. There should be a writing-desk with all the necessary appliances. In the evening it could be turned into a make-up table. There should be a little library, a wardrobe, a wash-basin, an arm-chair and a sofa on which the actor could rest after rehearsals or before performances, a parquet floor, heavy curtains on the windows that would help to darken the room during the matinées, good electric lighting at night and plenty of sunlight in the day. After all there are times when we actors do not see the sun for months on end: after the excitement at the theatre we go to bed late and get up late, then rush to the rehearsal, rehearse the whole day without seeing sunlight and, in winter, it is usually dark when we leave the theatre after the rehearsal. And thus day after day for many months. The dressing-rooms should be spick-and-span. We would need a large staff of cleaners, and that in the first place. Men's and women's dressing-rooms should be on different floors; there should be separate foyers for men and women where they could meet and receive guests. The foyer should have a piano, books, a big table for newspapers and chess (cards, like all other games of chance, would be prohibited). No one would be allowed in the theatre in overcoats, fur coats, rubbers or hats. All that applied to women too.

And when we had such a decent building, suitable enough for intellectual life, we could make strict demands on the players.

We also spoke of artistic ethics and entered our decisions into the minutes, at times even using aphorisms:

"There are no small parts, there are only small actors."

"Today Hamlet, tomorrow a supernumerary, but even as a supernumerary you must be an artiste."

"The poet, the actor, the artist, the tailor, the stage hand serve one goal, set by the poet in his play."

"Violation of the rules of the theatre is a crime."

"Lateness, laziness, caprice, hysterics, bad disposition, ignorance of the rôle, the necessity of repeating everything twice are all equally harmful to our enterprise and must be rooted out."

We decided to create a *national* theatre—with about the same tasks and plans that Ostrovsky dreamed of. To popularize the idea we agreed to arrange public lectures, apply to the Moscow City Duma, etc.[33]

We did what we had decided upon, but it turned out that the repertoire of the national theatre was considerably restricted by the censors and that we would have to reduce our artistic tasks almost to the minimum. We then decided to open a popular theatre.

My first conference with Nemirovich-Danchenko, which had decisive importance for our future theatre, began at 2 p.m. and lasted till 8 a.m. on the following day. It continued without a break for eighteen hours. But our pains were rewarded, for we came to an understanding on all fundamental questions and reached the conclusion that we could work together. A great deal of time remained before our theatre was to open in the autumn of 1898, a year and four months, to be exact. It was decided that Nemirovich-Danchenko would take the opportunity to acquaint himself with the players of our Society and I with his pupils who would join our company. And, indeed, I attended every performance at the Philharmonic School, just like Nemirovich-Danchenko saw and criticized every one of my productions. Criticizing and telling each other the truth, we came to know each other and the actors. At the same time we discussed the composition of our future troupe and its administration.[34]

PREPARING FOR THE NEW SEASON

WE WERE FACED by a first season of daily performances, which were to be prepared at all costs during the summer months. Where were we to begin working? We had no theatre of our own, for the one we had rented was to pass into our hands only in September, and until then there was absolutely nowhere to rehearse. Calculations revealed that it would be more economical to conduct rehearsals and pass the summer outside the city, better for the health too. Happily, one of the members of the Society of Art and Literature, N. N. Arkhipov (later the stage director Arbatov), offered us a good-size barn on his estate near the summer resort Pushkino, some twenty miles from Moscow. We accepted his offer and remodelled the barn to suit our needs–built a stage, a small auditorium, a rest-room for the men, one for the women, and added a roofed balcony where the actors might wait for their entrance and drink tea.

At first we had no servants, and all of us, stage directors, actors and administrators, took turns in cleaning the place. I was the first to be appointed to the task of cleaning and supervising the rehearsal. My début in this rôle was a failure at first, for I filled an empty samovar with charcoal, and without water it melted, leaving us without tea. I had not yet learned to sweep a floor, to handle a refuse shovel or to remove dust from chairs with any degree of dexterity. But I managed to create an order of the day which gave our rehearsals the tone of serious business. First of all I began to keep a chronicle, or rather a record-book, into which we entered all that had to do with the work of the theatre–what play was being rehearsed, who rehearsed, what actors missed the rehearsal, who was late and why, what disorders took place, what was to be ordered or made to facilitate the work.

Rehearsals began at 11 a.m. and ended at 5 p.m. After that the actors were free to bathe in the river near by, to dine and rest, but at eight they returned for the second rehearsal which lasted until 11 p.m. In this manner we were able to rehearse two plays each day. And what plays! In the morning *Tsar Fyodor,* in the evening *Antigone,* or in the morning *The Merchant of Venice,* and in the evening either *Hannele* or *The Sea-Gull.* But this was not all. Apart from the rehearsals in the barn, there was individual work with one or two of the actors. For this purpose we went into the woods when it was hot and into the care-taker's shack when it was cold. Most of the work with Ivan Moskvin on his rôle of Tsar Fyodor was done in the shack. Moskvin would go over his part with Nemirovich-Danchenko, while I would try out another actor, not quite so suitable for the rôle. The summer was sultry and we worked in oppressive heat, with the temperature often exceeding 100° F. To make things worse, our barn had an iron roof and it is easy to imagine how hot it was in our rehearsal hall and how we sweated rehearsing the boyars' bows in *Tsar Fyodor,* the gay dances in *The Merchant of Venice,* and the complicated metamorphoses in *Hannele.*

The actors of the troupe found lodging in Pushkino. Each group established their own household economies. In each group there was one person responsible for cleanliness, another for the food and a third for theatrical affairs, that is, for keeping his group informed of the slated or postponed rehearsals and of the new orders of the directors and administrators. There were many misunderstandings at the beginning, until the new-comers grew used to each other. We even had to part with some actors. For instance, at one of the rehearsals two actors quarrelled on the stage and called each other names that could not be allowed in the theatre and especially at a time when they were doing their jobs. Nemirovich-Danchenko and I decided to punish the two as an example for the rest, and to let the whole company pass judgement on them. All the rehearsals were immediately called off. An hour or two after the scandal the troupe was called to a meeting; for this purpose men on foot and on horseback were sent to look for all of the actors who were absent. All this was done deliberately with the aim of giving significance to a fact that would serve as an example for the future. When the meeting opened, Nemirovich-Danchenko and I explained to those present the dangerous nature of what had happened, and how it might become a harmful precedent. In other words, the troupe was asked a definite question: did it want to follow in the footsteps of many other theatres in which such things were commonplace, or would it put a stop once and for all to the recurrence of acts that could demoralize the company, and for this purpose punish the guilty parties? The actors proved much more severe than we had expected. They decided to part with their guilty comrade who, I might mention, was one of our most prominent actors. His departure forced us to rehearse almost all the plays that we were preparing, in order to train his understudies. There was another similar incident later on but in a milder form, and the new disturber was fined a large sum and reprimanded by all the actors in turn. This meeting was a memorable one and it did away with all attempts to violate stage discipline.

With everyone gaining better knowledge of our common work, we gradually established closer relationships. When there were no rehearsals the actors spent their time joking and fooling. We lived in a friendly and joyful atmosphere.

As for myself, I lived on my parents' estate, a few miles from Pushkino. I came to the rehearsals every morning at 11 and remained until late in the night. Between rehearsals I rested and dined at the home of one of our actors, Serafim Sudbinin, who later became a famous sculptor in Paris. Thanks to his wife's hospitality, I established my headquarters in his little hut. In the same hut the artist Victor Simov made the models for the scenery.[35] The need for constant contact with me, the chief stage director, had forced him to set up a temporary studio as near my whereabouts as he could.

The programme we set out to implement was a revolutionary one. We were protesting against the old manner of acting, against theatricality and affected pathos, declamation and over-acting, against ugly conventionalities and scenery, against the "star" system which was harmful for the company, against the way plays were written, against poor repertoires.

In order to rejuvenate art we declared war on all the conventionalities of the theatre: in acting, direction, scenery, costumes, interpretation of plays, etc.

The stake was high–our artistic future. We had to be successful at all costs. An inimical atmosphere was being built around us. Some wits chose us as their victims. Individuals in society and the press (which later treated us quite well) were trumpeting the failure that awaited us. We were dubbed amateurs and it was said that the new troupe had no actors but only luxurious costumes and scenery, that the new venture was just a hobby of a wilful merchant (meaning me). Many were angry at our statement that we would produce only ten plays each season, for the other theatres were staging a new play every week and playing to half-empty houses at that, and here was a group of amateurs that dared to dream of living a whole season on ten plays!

There was much work to do in all the sections of the complex theatrical apparatus: in the fields of acting, stage direction, costumes, decorations, administration, finances and so on and so forth. It was above all necessary to create the administrative and financial apparatus of the complex theatrical organism. The only one who could solve this difficult problem and steer our ship between all the Scylla and Charybdis which barred our way was Nemirovich-Danchenko, who was possessed of an exceptional administrative genius. In addition to his art work he was forced to occupy himself with this tedious, thankless but important task.

The second task was to order everything necessary for the production in good time: scenery, costumes and props.

In the other theatres of the time the problems of scenery were solved very simply. There was a backdrop and four or five wings in arched form. On these were painted a palace hall with entrances, passages, open and closed terraces, a seascape, and so on. In the middle there was the smooth, dirty theatrical floor and enough chairs to seat the *dramatis personae,* no more. In the spaces between the wings one could see the whole world behind the scenes, a crowd of stage hands, extras, wig-makers, and tailors who were promenading and eyeing the stage. If a door was necessary, it would be placed between the wings. It did not matter that there was a hole above the door. When it was necessary a street with a tremendous perspective of disappearing houses and a tremendous square with fountains and monuments were smeared on the backdrop and wings. Actors who stood near the backdrop were much taller than the houses. The dirty floor of the stage was naked, giving the actors every opportunity to stand near the prompter's box, which, as is well known, always attracts the servants of Melpomene.

It was the period of the reign of the luxurious theatrical pavilion, empire or rococo painted on canvas, with the cloth doors shivering when they were closed or opened, and opening and closing of themselves with the entrances of the actors.

The wings were usually well planned and mathematically measured. We mixed everything up so thoroughly that the spectators considered our scenery quite natural. We replaced the painted pavilion by wall-papered walls with stucco cornices and ceilings. We covered the floor with decorated canvas, destroyed its monotonous flatness by erecting all sorts of dais and platforms, stairways and passages–all this enabled us to plan picturesque scenes. We "planted" trees on the forestage to allow actors to roam among them. At least they would not stand in front of the prompter's box and be an eyesore to the audience. Usually there was just one room on the stage. We showed whole flats of three or four rooms.

The question of *mises-en-scène* and settings was also solved very simply in those days. The plan was established once and for all: on the right a sofa, on the left a table and two chairs. One scene of the play would take place near the sofa, the next near the table with the two chairs, the third in the middle of the stage near the prompter's box, then again near the sofa and again the prompter's box.

We would make use of the most unusual sections and corners of the rooms, with the furniture turned with the back to the audience, giving the impression of a fourth wall.

It is a custom to seat the actor so that he faces the audience; we seated him with his back to the auditorium, and in the most interesting moments at that. Very often this trick helped the director to hide actors' inexperience in climactic moments.

It is a custom to play on a lighted stage; we staged whole scenes (and very often important ones) in complete darkness.

People criticized the stage director, thinking that he was trying to be original, when in reality all he was doing was saving inexperienced actors who could not fulfil the tasks they were assigned.

In all this work the stage director needed the help of the artist in planning a suitable *mise-en-scène*, arranging properties and creating the necessary atmosphere.

Luckily, our decorator Victor Simov was a rare exception among the artists of that period, for he was interested not only in painting for the theatre, but in the play itself, its interpretation, and its peculiarities from the actors' and stage director's view-points. This helped him to devote his talent to the needs of the theatre.

At that time, almost no one was interested in the history of costume, no one made collections of ancient clothes, or books on costumes, or anything of the sort at all. There were only three styles in vogue in the *costumiers'* shops: *Faust*, *Les Huguenots*, and "Molière," if one does not reckon our national boyar fashions.

"Have you some sort of a Spanish costume, like *Faust* or *Les Huguenots*?" was the question usually asked of the *costumiers*.

"We have Valentines, Mephistopheles, and St. Bries of all colours," was the usual answer.

People could not even take advantage of models that were already created. For instance, while they were in Moscow, the Meiningen Players were kind and generous enough to let one of the Moscow theatres copy the scenery and the costumes of one of plays they had produced. But it was impossible to recognize the costumes, for every one of the actors for whom they had been made had added his own ideas, ordering the tailor to add in one place and take away in another, so that in the end all the costumes looked as if they were made for *Faust* and *Les Huguenots*. The theatrical tailors had their own traditions and never condescended to look at the books and sketches of the artists, explaining that all novelty and change from the usual in the costume was due to the lack of experience on the part of the artist.

"I've made plenty of them. Anyone can see that the artist is doing this for the first time in his life." This was the usual tenor of the tailors' remarks.

However, there were some whom we were able, though with a great deal of effort, to move a little from their seemingly impregnable position. This happened at the time I was with the Society of Art and Literature. Since then, they had managed to create a stencil *à la* Stanislavsky which eventually

Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1898)

wore out and degenerated into something that was no whit better than the earlier styles of *Faust* and *Les Huguenots*. This forced me, as it had done when I was with the Society of Art and Literature, to undertake the preparation of costumes myself, so that I might find something fresh, something that had not been seen before, something that might "knock the eye of the public

Konstantin Stanislavsky
(1899)

out" as we expressed ourselves at that time. I was helped a great deal in this by the actress Maria Lilina (my wife) who had fine taste for costume as well as inventiveness. Besides, the actress Maria Grigoryeva, who was with us at the Society of Art and Literature and who is still with us, was very much interested in costume-making and offered her aid. There were also other helpers, relatives and friends. First of all we began to study the costumes of Tsar Fyodor's epoch, for Alexei Tolstoi's tragedy was to be our first production. The accepted stencil of boyar costumes was one that was especially conventionalized. In museum costumes there are nuances in lines and cutting which are never noticed by ordinary tailors, but which are most typical of one epoch or another. They are hard to achieve; one needs the services of an artist and a connoisseur. It was this secret, this *je ne sais quoi** of costume that we were seeking. We read all the books there were, studied all the engravings, monastic and churchly robes and all the other museum items that could be found. But we were unable to copy those archaeological models, and we began to look for old embroidery, ancient head-dress, and so forth. I organized an expedition to various cities to visit second-hand dealers and to see peasants and fishermen in the villages, for I knew that the latter kept much that was old and valuable in their trunks. It was there that most of the Moscow antiquaries made their purchases. It was necessary to attack quickly, so that our competitors would not have time to forestall us. The expedition was crowned with success and we brought home a great many things.

Then we arranged another expedition to such ancient cities as Yaroslavl, Rostov Yaroslavsky, Troitse-Sergievo and others. One of the former members of the Society of Art and Literature, who held an important post in the railway administration and had a private car of his own, offered us to use it. Part of the troupe, headed by Nemirovich-Danchenko, remained to rehearse in Pushkino while Victor Simov, my assistant stage director Alexander Sanin, my wife, a *costumière,* several actors and I went in search of material. This was a memorable journey. The private car had a large salon in which we dined (we had a special conductor to serve us). In the evening we had dances, *petits jeux,* gymnastics, serious discussions of the new plans for the future theatre, exhibitions of the materials and objects bought on our journey. At one of the small stations we liked we had our car detached and stayed there for a full day and night and gave ourselves over to an enchanting picnic—the weather was fine, the night bright and we spent the time roaming, gathering berries and cooking our food over a camp-fire in the woods. In this manner we reached the ancient city of Rostov Yaroslavsky, an interesting city on the shore of a large lake. In the centre of the city is a large Kremlin with a palace once inhabited by Ivan the Terrible, with an old cathedral and in it famous bells, known far and wide for their chimes. This Kremlin was at one time in a dilapidated state, but there appeared an energetic man, who restored the whole Kremlin of Rostov with its palaces and cathedrals, and we found it in exemplary condition. There he had gathered a large collection of antiques, embroideries, samples of cloth, towels, printed cotton and carpets, which he had bought in the villages and from antiquaries. The name of this remarkable man was Shliakov. He was a simple harness manufacturer and was almost illiterate, but this did not prevent him from becoming a connoisseur in that branch of archaeology which dealt with printed cotton.

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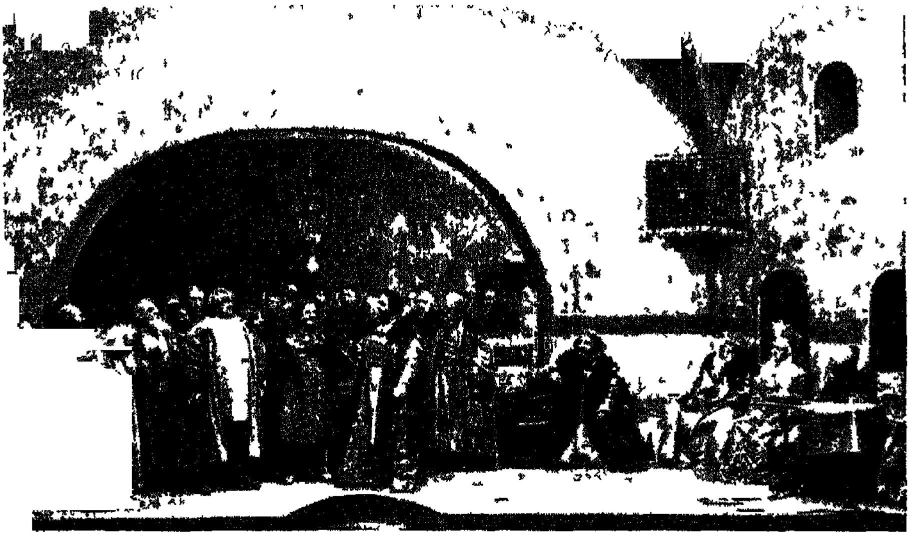
* I know not what. (Fr.)

Shliakov offered us the keys of the palace and museum, and we took down not only the plan of the palace and its rooms, but also sketched all the treasures of the museum. From the purely theatrical desire to gather as much of the atmosphere as we could in the palace itself we decided to pass a night there. In the darkness of night, with only dull candlelight in the corners, we suddenly heard footsteps on the flagstones of the floor. The low door of the chamber of Ivan the Terrible opened and a tall figure in monastic robes bent low in order to enter through the opening. At last the figure squeezed through the doorway and grew to its full height. We recognized one of our comrades. His appearance was unexpected and we suddenly seemed to breathe the very air of austere Russian antiquity. When our comrade, clad in museum robes, was passing through the long corridor over the arch of the ancient gates, and his candle gleamed in the windows, throwing threatening shadows about it, it seemed that the ghost of the Terrible Tsar was walking in the palace.

On the next day it was arranged to have the famous bells in the tower ring for us. This was something we had never heard before. Imagine a long, corridor-like tower at the top of a church, its whole length hung with large and small bells of all tones. Many bell-ringers ran from one bell to another in order to ring them in the proper rhythm. It was an original performance of an original bell orchestra. Many rehearsals had been necessary in order to teach the men to run from one bell to another in a definite tempo and obtain the necessary rhythm.

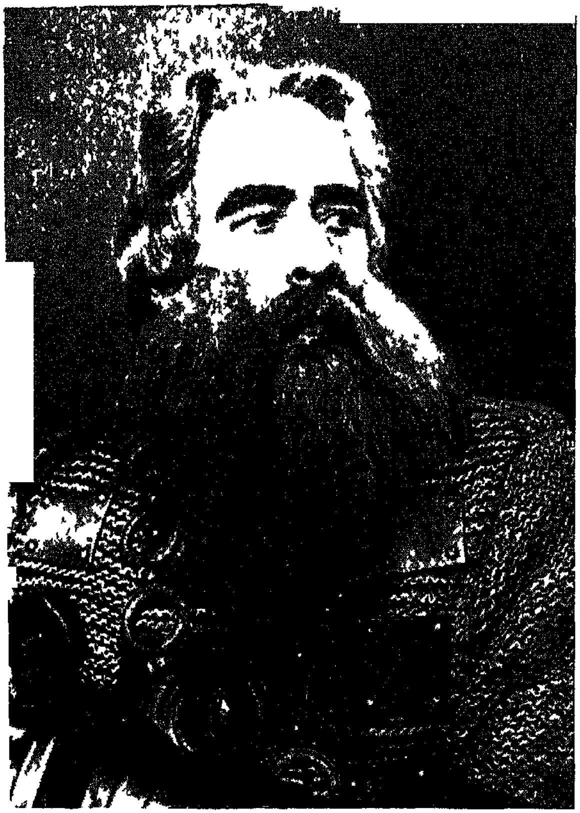


Scene from the first act of Alexei Tolstoi's *Tsar Fyodor* (1909)

After Rostov Yaroslavsky, we visited a few more cities and then sailed down the Volga from Yaroslavl with the current, stopping at cities on the way to buy Tatar materials, coats and foot-gear. It was then that we bought all the boots worn to the present day by our actors in *Tsar Fyodor.* Our merry party took possession of the steamer and set the tone on board. The captain liked us and did not interfere with us. Day and night all that was heard was laughter: we laughed, the other passengers laughed with us, for most of them joined our little company. On the night before we left the steamer we arranged a masquerade. The actors and some of the passengers put on the costumes we had bought, and sang and played and danced to their hearts' content. For me, the stage director, and for Simov, the artist, this was a sort of an examination by artificial light of our purchases on living figures, moving about in different directions and accidentally meeting and parting We sat on one side and watched, made notes and drew plans of how to take best advantage of what we had bought.

Returning home, we added all the material we brought with us to what we had collected before. For hours and even days we sat surrounded by cloth, rags, embroideries, and blended colours, seeking combinations that could enliven the bleakest cloths and costumes, and tried, if not to copy, then to catch the tone of the individual pieces of embroidery, the ornaments of the collars of the boyar costumes, the royal robes, the headgear, and so on. We wanted to do away with vulgar theatrical gilding and cheap scenic luxury; we wanted to find another, simpler, richer finish infused with the spirit of the past. Now and then we were successful, but far from always. Where were we to find materials luxuriant enough for the royal robes? Excerpts from books, the sketches we had made in museums, while acquainting us with the locale and character of the past, set us some extremely interesting tasks, but we had neither the means nor the methods to fulfil them. This decided me to undertake a new journey–this time to the fair at Nizhny-Novgorod, where one could often find excellent antiques. I was unusually lucky, for I had hardly arrived in the place where the antiques were being sold when I came across a whole heap of refuse mixed with old things and rags. From beneath this heap peered a piece of the same material of which the Tsar Fyodor's costume (the one he wears in his first appearance on the stage) is made. I had found what I had so long been looking for. It was necessary to get hold of this material at any price. But a group of people–apparently buyers–was already gathering around the heap. I learned from them that this heap had just been brought from an outlying monastery which was selling its property to stave off poverty I dug in other parts of the heap–a gold-embroidered female head-dress peeped out, one of those worn by the women in *Tsar Fyodor;* in another place was a piece of ancient wood carving and a pitcher. It was necessary to act. I decided to buy the whole heap as it lay. It was hard to find the owner of the collection, for it lay without anyone watching it and it could easily be taken away. At last I found the monk in charge, bought the whole heap from him for a thousand rubles, and then spent a whole day sorting the things, for I was afraid that during the night someone might steal my new-found treasures. It was a terrible job, exhaustive and dirty, and at the end of the day I was fagged out. Nevertheless, on that first day I saved all that was most important and necessary and buried the rest in the centre, meaning to continue my examination on the following day. Sweating and greasy, I returned to the hotel in a triumphant mood, took a bath, and like Pushkin's Miser Knight spent the night admiring my purchases. I returned to Moscow with a rich purchase, for I brought not only costumes, but many other things for *Tsar Fyodor*. There were a lot of wooden dishes for the first scene of Shuisky's banquet, there was carved wood for furniture, Oriental couch covers, and so on. On the stage it is not necessary to have luxurious scenes all through the play. What one needs is colour spots, and it was these colour spots that I had found on my lucky journey.

Meanwhile, our improvised *costumières* had grown very adept in the creation of the true ancient tone in the costumes and the embroideries. On the stage not all that glitters is gold, and not all that glitters looks like gold We learned to make the most of stage possibilities and to pass as gold and jewels simple buttons, shells, stones especially cut and prepared, sealing-wax, and ordinary string, which, when painted, is a perfect imitation of delicate mother-of-pearl embroidery. My purchases gave us new ideas and in a very little while we began to add imitation work to the costumes as well as real antiques. Work was in full swing.


As Prince Ivan Shuisky in Alexei Tolstoi's *Tsar Fyodor* (1922)

The whole regime in the theatre needed revising and rejuvenating. In those days all the dramatic performances began with music. The orchestra, really unnecessary for any purposes of the play itself and living its own peculiar life, was in the most prominent place before the stage and interfered with the actors and the spectators. Before the performances and in the intermissions it would invariably play Suppé overtures, polkas with castanets, etc. What has such music to do with *Hamlet*? Light music only interfered with Shakespeare, for it created an altogether different atmosphere in the auditorium. Special music was required for every play. But where was one to find a composer who understood the demands that the play made on music? For instance, we ordered a special overture for *Tsar Fyodor*. It proved to be an excellent symphony, but did it really help our dramatic purposes?

The result was that we eliminated overtures and music during the intermissions. Henceforth, when the play required music, we had an orchestra in the wings.

Then there was another age-old tradition we had to fight against. For instance, leading players and visiting actors usually made their entrances amidst ovations and began their performances by thanking the audience. There was applause again on their exit and they would return to take their bows. Lensky of the Maly Theatre was already waging a struggle against this custom, but in other theatres it prevailed as strong as ever.

In our theatre we abolished the curtain calls–during the performance as well as in the intermissions and after the finale. We did not do this in the early years of our theatre, but later on.

Lackeys and ushers in waistcoats and uniforms with gold buttons and galloons, just like in the imperial theatres, rushed nonchalantly about the auditorium, interfering with the actors, spectators and performances. We strictly forbade the servants and the public to walk about the hall after the curtain had gone up. In the beginning, however, neither this ban nor the notices we stuck everywhere helped. There were many discontented people and there were even scandals. One day, shortly after we had abolished curtain calls, I saw a group of late-comers hurrying to the theatre: they were hastening to occupy their seats before the curtain rose. What had happened? The actors were not obeying the spectators, they had stopped making curtain calls. No longer feeling themselves masters in the theatre, the spectators finally became obedient.

In all the theatres there were painted red cloth and curtains with gold tassels, also painted, in imitation of rich velvet material and real gold tassels. The corners were bent, revealing a landscape with mountains, valleys, seas, towns, parks, fountains and all other attributes of poesy. Who needed these gaudy, disgusting hues that got on one's nerves and killed the beauty in decorations? We threw them out. In their stead we hung folded draperies of subdued hues. Bright colours, we said, should be used by the artist. And, finally, we replaced our drop curtain with one that parted in the middle.

The hardest job was with the actors. I had to mould them–young actors and old, amateurs and professionals, inexperienced and experienced, talented and talentless, spoilt and unspoilt–into one well-knit troupe. The aim was to acquaint the new members of the company with the main fundamentals of our art.

It was an interesting task.

Unfortunately, in those days I did not enjoy much authority with the experienced provincial actors to whom our young players willingly listened. There was no hope, of course, of training new-comers and retraining the old provincial actors within a few months, in time for the opening of the season, particularly since the latter were critical of our demands, insisted that they could not be fulfilled and that they were not scenic, that the spectators would not understand the nuances on which I insisted. They affirmed that the stage demanded cruder methods of acting–a loud voice, visualized action, a rapid tempo and full-toned acting. To many of the actors this "full-toned" acting did not mean fullness of inner emotion, but fullness of shouting, exaggerated gesture and action, simple delineation of the rôle, larded with animal temperament.

When I clashed with the actors, I sought the help of my friends, my old comrades in the Society of Art and Literature, while Nemirovich-Danchenko appealed for assistance to his pupils. We would ask them to mount the stage and show the obstinate players that our demands could be fulfilled.

When even this failed to convince them, we would go on the stage ourselves, act and draw applause from those who believed as we did, and with this success to back us we would insist on the fulfilment of our demands. In these moments Nemirovich-Danchenko showed himself a brilliant actor, and this revealed itself in his stage direction. After all, to be a good director one had to be a born actor.

But it was not always that this succeeded.

Often I had to take even more radical steps to carry through our artistic principles.

Nemirovich-Danchenko had his own methods of persuasion, while I acted in the following manner: I would leave the obstinate actor in peace, and redouble my efforts with his stage partner, giving him the most interesting *mises-en-scène,* helping him as much as a stage director could help an actor, working with him after rehearsals. As for the obstinate player, I would let him do whatever he wished. Usually his desire boiled down to standing in front of the prompter's box, looking across the footlights at the spectators, exchanging compliments with them and intoxicating himself with declamatory speech and theatrical poses. I must confess that I often sank so low as to intrigue in order to teach the obstinate actor a lesson and would help him to stress all the outdated conventionalities which he called tradition. In reply to an over-pathetic speech of an experienced actor I would teach his partner to speak his lines simply and realistically. Simplicity and realism helped to accentuate the mistakes of the obstinate actor.

This preparatory work would go on until the test rehearsal at which the play was presented before the whole company and friends for the first time. Here, the old, obstinate, experienced actors usually failed miserably, while their younger comrades would be complimented for their performances. This had a sobering effect. One experienced actor failed so completely at one of these rehearsals and was so badly shaken by it that he came over from Pushkino on a *troika* in the middle of the night and woke me up. I came out in my night clothes and we talked far into the dawn. This time he listened to me like a schoolboy who had flunked in his exams, and swore that he would be obedient and attentive in the future. After this I could tell him all that I thought necessary to say and all that I could not tell him before when he felt superior to me.

At other difficult moments I was helped by the despotism I had learned from Cronegk. I demanded obedience and got it. True, many actors performed as I directed, but they were not yet ready to understand my demands emotionally.

What was I to do? I could see no other means, since we were faced by the necessity of creating a complete troupe and a new theatre with new trends in the space of a few months.

We dealt differently with inexperienced new-comers and pupils. They never argued, for they did not know how.

We had to show them how their rôles were "played." The young actors copied the stage director, sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully, and the result was usually an interesting interpretation of the rôle.

The more talented of the younger players–like Ivan Moskvin, Vladimir Gribunin, Vsevolod Meierhold, Vasily Luzhsky, Maria Lilina and Olga Knipper–naturally displayed quite a bit of initiative.

The rôle of the rejuvenator of the repertoire was undertaken by Nemirovich-Danchenko. In this sphere, too, the theatre was waiting for an innovator, for much that was being shown then had become outdated.

Nemirovich-Danchenko revealed exquisite literary taste and sense in selecting the repertoire, in which he included Russian and foreign classics, as well as contemporary plays by young authors.

He began with Anton Chekhov, whom he admired as a writer and loved as a friend. The following will serve as an illustration. Nemirovich-Danchenko had been awarded the Griboyedov Prize for the best play of the season. He considered, however, that this award was unjust and declined it in favour of Chekhov's *The Sea-Gull,* which also had its *première* that season. Nemirovich-Danchenko dreamed of staging this play in our theatre, for he was convinced that Chekhov had found new paths for the art of the time. But there was one serious obstacle. *The Sea-Gull,* produced by the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg, was a flop despite the excellent cast.[36] Chekhov had attended the *première,* and both the production and its failure affected him so badly that he refused even to contemplate its revival. It cost Nemirovich-Danchenko a great deal of effort to persuade Chekhov that the play had been shown to the public in the wrong manner and that its failure did not mean its death. Chekhov could not make up his mind to live over again the tortures he had undergone in Petersburg, but Nemirovich-Danchenko finally got his permission to produce the play.

And here Nemirovich-Danchenko encountered still another obstacle. Only a few people at that time understood Chekhov's play, although now it seems so simple to most of us. It seemed that it was not suitable for the stage, that

Anton Chekhov with Moscow Art Theatre players (1899)

it was monotonous and boring. First of all Nemirovich-Danchenko began to persuade me, for after its first reading I also had found *The Sea-Gull* strange. My literary ideals at that period were still rather primitive. Nemirovich-Danchenko spent several evenings hammering the beauties of Chekhov's work into my head. He had the knack of telling the story of a play so well that one couldn't help liking it. How many times in later years both he and I, and the theatre as a whole, suffered because of this ability of his. He would tempt us with his story of a play, but when we began reading it, we would find that a great deal of what Vladimir Ivanovich told us of the play belonged to him and not to the author of the play.

In this case too, while he spoke of *The Sea-Gull* I liked it. But as soon as I remained alone with the script, I was bored. And it was I who was to write the *mises-en-scène* and prepare the plans for the play, for at that time I was the only one in the theatre who was closely acquainted with that kind of work.

I was allowed to leave Moscow and stay at the estate of one of my friends, there to write the plans and send them to Pushkino where the preparatory rehearsals were taking place. At that time, our actors were as yet inexperienced, and there was no other way but to be despotic. Hiding in my study I prepared a detailed *mise-en-scène* that agreed with my emotions, my inner sight and hearing. In these moments I cared little for the inner emotions of the actor. I sincerely thought at that time that it was possible to order others to live and feel according to another's will. I gave orders to all and for all places of the performance, and these orders were binding for all.

In my stage director's copy of the play I wrote everything–how, where, and in what way one was to understand the rôle and the hints of the author, what voice one was to use, how to act and move, where and how to change positions, etc. There were special drawings for all the business of entrances, exits, and changes of positions. There was a description of the scenery, costumes, make-ups, manners, way of walking, habits of the characters. I had three or four weeks to complete this vast and difficult work with *The Sea-Gull,* and so I sat in one of the towers of a country-house from which there opened a monotonous view of the endless steppe.

To my amazement, the job seemed very easy: I saw and felt the play.

From Pushkino I received a great deal of praise for my work. I was surprised, not so much because Nemirovich-Danchenko praised me, for he was captivated by the play and might be prejudiced in favour of my work, but because the actors themselves, who had been against the play, wrote the same things that Nemirovich-Danchenko did.[37] At last I received a letter that Chekhov himself had attended a rehearsal and had approved of my work. From the same letter I learned that Chekhov was very much interested in our theatre and prophesied a bright future for it.

"It seems that he has grown to like us," they wrote me from Moscow.

THE FIRST SEASON

I DID NOT FIND the actors at Pushkino when I returned home. They were already in the city, in the theatre that we had rented for the season.

When I approached the theatre after my little vacation I could not help trembling with excitement because we had a theatre, a stage, dressing-rooms and actors–real actors. In this theatre we could create the life of which we had dreamt so long; we could cleanse art of all flotsam and jetsam; we could create a temple instead of a show-booth. Imagine my disappointment when I entered the same Punch-and-Judy show-house on which we had declared war.

The Hermitage in Karetny Ryad was in a terrible state–dirty, dusty, uncomfortable, unheated, with the smell of beer and some sort of acid that had remained from the summer use of the building. There was a garden, and the public was entertained with various divertissements in the open air, but in inclement weather the entertainment would be carried over into the theatre. The furnishings of the theatre had been intended only for garden audiences and were tasteless. This could be seen in the choice of colours, in the cheap decorations, in the miserable attempt at luxury, in the posters hung on the walls, in the stage curtain with advertisements, in the uniforms of the ushers, in the choice of food in the buffet and in the entire insulting character of the building and the disorder of the house.

We had to get rid of all this, but we had no money to create an interior that would be bearable for cultured people. We painted all the walls and the posters on them white. We covered the rotten chairs with decent material; we found carpets and spread them in the corridors which bordered on the auditorium, so as to deaden the sound of footsteps which would interfere with the performance. We took the nasty curtains from the doors and the windows; we washed the windows and painted their frames, hung tulle curtains and covered the worst of the corners with laurel trees and flowers, giving a somewhat cosy appearance to the auditorium.

But no matter how we repaired the old ruin, we could really accomplish nothing. No sooner had we cleaned or repaired one thing than we would find another. I tried to drive a nail into the wall of my dressing-room in order to hang a shelf, but the wall was so thin and old that a brick fell out from under the blows of the hammer (the dressing-rooms were originally a barn). There was all the cold air one wanted coming through the hole. Our worst problem was heating the theatre, for all the chimneys were out of order and we were forced to have them repaired at a time when the cold had already set in and it was necessary to heat the theatre every day. This general condition of the theatre brought us a great deal of trouble and put many obstacles in the path of our labour. But we did not give up hope and continued to struggle with them. And they were very serious. I remember that one day my costume had frozen to the wall and I had to tear it off and wear it for the performance. How many of our rehearsals were conducted to the accompaniment of deafening blows on metal pipes which were being repaired in a hurry only to break down again on the morrow. There was something wrong with the light and while the wires were being repaired, the rehearsals took place by candlelight, almost in complete darkness. Each day brought its own surprises. One day we would learn that the scenery could not be stored on the stage and that it was necessary to build a new barn for it; the next, that it was necessary to simplify the *mise-en-scène*, the production, and the scenery itself because the stage was not large enough; or I would be forced to deny myself some favourite effect because there was not enough light and mechanization.

All this held up our work at the most important moment before the opening of the theatre, and we had to open it as soon as possible because our coffers were empty. In addition to this complex job there was administrative work. It was necessary to advertise the opening of the theatre; to think up a name for the theatre, but as we could only guess its future physiognomy, this question hung fire from day to day. The Popular Theatre, The Drama Theatre, The Moscow Theatre, The Theatre of the Society of Art and Literature—all these names were critically discussed, and none passed the test. The worst of the matter was that there was no time to concentrate and think about the name. I strained all my attention on trying to find out what would be the final result of what we were rehearsing. Sometimes I would sit at a rehearsal and feel that one place was too long, and another imperfect; that some error had crept into the production and was spoiling the over-all effect. If I could see a play once from beginning to end, everything would be clear. But there was no chance to stage a complete, uninterrupted rehearsal. First of all, the dim lighting gave me no opportunity to examine either the groupings or the mimicry of the actors, nor the general appearance of the scenery. Then an actor would be late with his entrance because he had been called to try a costume. Or, at a most difficult moment, somebody would come and I myself would be called to the office because of some urgent business. Like the tortured Tantalus, I tried to reach something that was forever escaping me.

At one such moment, when I was trying to guess the slowly forming sequences of the performance, when I felt that in another instant I would understand what was to be done and discover the secret of the scene, of the act, of the play, I heard Nemirovich-Danchenko's voice booming in my ear:

"We can't wait any longer. I propose that we call our theatre The Moscow Art and Popular Theatre. Do you agree–yes or no? We must decide at once."

I must confess that at that moment it did not matter to me what our theatre would be called. And without thinking, I gave my consent.

However, when I saw the advertisement in the papers of the opening of the Moscow Art and Popular Theatre, I became frightened, for I realized what responsibility we had taken upon ourselves with the word "Art." I was deeply worried.

But fate sent me solace. That same day Ivan Moskvin was being shown in *Tsar Fyodor* and he made a tremendous impression on me.[38] I wept with joy at his performance, unable to hold back my emotions, full of hope that among us there were talented people who might become great artistes. There was something to suffer for and something to work for. There were other performances that gladdened our hearts–Alexander Vishnevsky as Boris Godunov, Vasily Luzhsky as Ivan Shuisky, Olga Knipper as Irina, and others.

Time flew. There came the last evening before the opening. The rehearsals ended, but it seemed that nothing had been done and that the performance was not ready. I was afraid that the incompleted details would ruin the whole production. I wanted to rehearse all night, but Nemirovich-Danchenko sensibly insisted on stopping all work and giving the artistes time to concentrate and rest before the next evening, October 14, 1898.[39] I did not leave the theatre despite the late hour–anyway, I could not sleep that night. I remained sitting in a box and waiting to see the hanging of the grayish-green curtain, which, it seemed to us, was destined to revolutionize art by its originality and simplicity.[40]

The opening day. All of us who took part in the work saw very well that our whole future was at stake. On that evening we would either pass through the gates of art, or they would shut themselves before our very faces, and I would have to spend the rest of my life in a boring office.

All these thoughts were especially poignant on the day of the opening. My worries were increased by my sense of helplessness. My business of stage directing was done, it was behind me; the matter now lay in the hands of the actors. Only they could bring the performance to life, and I could do nothing more than pace the floor, suffering and helpless, in the wings. How could I sit in my dressing-room when the stage had become the ground for a battle between life and death? It is not surprising that I wanted to take full advantage of the last moment of my active part in the production just before the curtain rose. I had to impress the actors for the last time.

Trying to kill in myself the deadly fear of what was in the offing, trying to look brave, happy and confident, I turned to the actors before the last bell for the curtain with words of encouragement. It was not a good thing that my voice broke now and then from irregular breathing. In the very middle of my speech the orchestra on the other side of the curtain struck up the overture and drowned my words. Deprived of the possibility of speaking, there was nothing left for me to do but to begin to dance so as to give vent to the energy that was seething in me and that I wished to instil in the actors who were soon to face the public. I danced, sang, shouted encouraging sentences, with a face that was white and deathlike, with frightened eyes, with broken breath, with convulsive gestures. This tragic dance of mine was later dubbed "The Dance of Death."

"Konstantin Sergeyevich, leave the stage! At once! Don't annoy the actors!" I heard the hard, commanding voice of my assistant, the actor Nikolai Alexandrov, in whose hands the entire administration of the performance had been placed. He had exceptional abilities in such matters, a knowledge of actors' psychology, and ingenuity and authority at decisive moments.

My dance stopped on a half movement. Driven away, my feelings hurt, I walked away from the stage in shame and locked myself in my dressing-room.

"I have given so much to the production, and now, at the most important moment, I am driven away as if I were a stranger."

Don't pity me, reader. My tears were the tears of an actor. We are sentimental people, we actors, and we love to play the part of *injured innocence* not only on the stage, but in life also.

Later on I came to appreciate Alexandrov's courage and determination for what it was worth.

The curtain of our theatre rose first on Alexei Tolstoi's tragedy *Tsar Fyodor*.

The play started with the words: "I place great hopes in this affair." This phrase then seemed highly symptomatic and prophetic.

I shall not describe the play, for it is too well known. Here I shall only describe the scenes that are usually omitted now.

The first scene was that of a feast in the home of Prince Shuisky to which he has invited his friends for the purpose of signing a petition that the Tsar divorce the Tsarina. The boyar feasts had old and outworn stencils on the Russian stage. It was necessary to avoid these stencils at any or all costs. I used tricks in staging this scene. The left side of the stage was turned into a covered terrace with large wooden columns in the Russian style. It was separated from the footlights by a balustrade, which hid the lower halves of the bodies of the boyars behind it. This gave a certain piquancy to the scene. The right half of the stage pictured the roofs of Moscow, the towers and the domes of the medieval city losing themselves in perspective. This gave a great deal of atmosphere and picturesqueness to the setting, and the terrace, which was only half as wide as the stage, enabled us to reduce the number of supernumeraries. The smaller the space, the denser the crowd appears and the fewer people is it required to have on the stage. If the feast had been shown on the whole stage, it would have looked thin with the small number of extras we could afford at that time.

The covered terrace twisted backstage around a corner of the house and was lost in the wings. At the turning-point there sat many of the actors and supernumeraries, who moved between the stage and the wings, giving an illusion of distance and free space to the whole scene. It seemed that there were many people in the wings and that it was very lively there.

The colourful costumes of the boyars, the servants carrying great platters with geese and shotes and large pieces of beef, and fruits and vegetables; the barrels of wine that were rolled in on to the stage; the wooden goblets and dishes that I had brought from Nizhny-Novgorod; the slightly drunken guests; the beautiful Princess Mstislavskaya who passed as hostess among the guests with a big winecup; the noise of happy and of serious discussions, and later the long line of the signatories to the appeal–all of this was new and unusual at the time we first produced the play.

In contrast to this picture there was the life of the court with its etiquette, its bows, its museum costumes, cloths, throne, ceremony. I will not describe the scene of the reconciliation between Shuisky and Godunov, which is now so well known in Russia, Europe and America.

But there was another scene–"On the Yauza"–in which the national hero Shuisky is led to prison and execution at the order of Godunov, and which takes place on a bridge outside the city. From the first wing on the right which depicted the highway, a log bridge was thrown to the last wing on the left where it descended to the ground again. Under the bridge one saw a river, barges, boats. On the bridge was an endless procession of the most variegated figures dressed in the ancient costumes of the provinces of Central Russia. At the entrance to the bridge sat beggars, and a blind minstrel sang a song written for the purpose by the composer Grechaninov. This was sung to rouse the people against Godunov. The crowd stopped, listened, grew in proportions and, instigated by the fiery supporter of the Shuiskys, the centenarian Kuryukov, behaved militantly. When the Shuiskys appeared, surrounded by guards, there was a pitched battle. The guards had the better of it. Weeping women kissed the hands and feet of the national hero, bidding him farewell, and he spoke his last words on earth to them.

THE PRODUCTIONS OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

I SHALL NOT DESCRIBE all the productions of the Art Theatre. There were too many of them and that would occupy too much space in my book. Moreover, many of them were produced by Vladimir Ivanovich alone, and while I knew all about the plans, I did not take part in their production. They included, for instance, Ibsen's *Brand, Rosmersholm* and *Peer Gynt,* Dostoyevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers* and *Nikolai Stavrogin* (which played an important part in the life of our theatre), *Ivanov,* Pushkin's *Boris Godunov,* L. Andreyev's *Anathema,* Yushkevich's *Miserere* and Merezhkovsky's *There Will Be Joy.* I have to limit and narrow down the horizons of my reminiscences and group my material in such a way as to describe what was most characteristic in the evolution of the Art Theatre and what exerted the greatest influence on my own artistic evolution.

To make things as clear as possible I shall divide the work of the theatre into three periods—one from the founding of the Art Theatre in 1898 to the 1905 Revolution, the second from 1906 to the October Revolution, and the third from the October Revolution to the present day.

First of all I shall dwell on the work of the first period—a period of quest, and shall give a brief description of its mistakes, tortures, conclusions and results. Let the reader not be surprised by my severe and exact attitude towards myself, my work and its results. And let him not think that I am showing off. This severity is natural in one who is always seeking for the new. If the artiste is satisfied with what he has found and decides to rest on his laurels, the quest ends and progress terminates. For the spectator who was content with what he got, much of what he received from the Moscow Art Theatre, its directors, players and me, often seemed important and not at all bad. But for me and for many of us who always look ahead, the present, the thing done always seemed outdated and backward when seen in the light of the possibilities held out by the future.

The first period of the Moscow Art Theatre is the continuation of what took place in the Society of Art and Literature. In this period, as before, our young and expansive hearts responded to all that was new, even though temporary, all that was in fashion and attracted us in art. In these researches of ours there was no system, no order, no well-founded leading motives. We would throw ourselves to one side and then to the other, taking with us all that we had found before. We included the new in our baggage and carried it in the opposite direction towards some other modish path. On the way we lost what we had gained before, with much of it turning into stencils in the process. But some of the important and necessary things remained in the innermost recesses of the soul or became one with the conquests of our developing technique.

It was thus that we worked and developed in many directions and along many paths. These were the lines of creative quest which, like strands in a rope, part only to meet again and intertwine.

I shall pull strands out of the rope and analyze each of them separately. I shall pretend that each of these strands represents a whole row, a whole series of homogeneous productions and quests.

The first series of productions typical of the first phase of our artistic activity was along the *costume drama* line. The plays included *Tsar Fyodor, The Death of Ivan the Terrible, The Merchant of Venice, Antigone, Fuhrmann Henschel, The Power of Darkness* and *Julius Caesar.*

I shall start with Alexei Tolstoi's *The Death of Ivan the Terrible,* which, so far as direction and acting were concerned, was a sequel to *Tsar Fyodor.*

In this production the costume drama line revealed itself more fully and with greater strength, and even with more of its faults and merits. It had some successful places which deserve being recalled. For instance, the first scene, which takes place in the Duma.

It is early morning. All is dark. A low palace room, oppressive and gloomy as the whole reign of Ivan. The mood is church-like, like the mood before early mass, when figures of worshippers with concentrated faces gather in the gloom, moving slowly, their gestures still reminiscent of their dreams, their voices hoarse and sleepy. The men stand in small groups. They think rather than talk. The boyars are worried, for they see no way out. Ivan has abdicated, there is no one to replace him, but they are all so terrorized that they cannot even decide to go to beg the Tsar to reconsider his decision and return to the throne. Light begins to break through the gloom. The first ray of the sun passes

18 98

ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННО-ОБЩЕДОСТУПНЫЙ ТЕАТ

(Каретный рядъ, „Эрмитажъ").

ВЪ СРЕДУ, 14ГО ОКТЯБРЯ,

ПОСТАВЛЕНО БУДЕТЪ (ВЪ ПЕРВЫЙ РАЗЪ НА СЦЕНѢ:

ЦАРЬ ѲЕДОРЪ ІОАННОВИЧ

Трагедія въ 5-ти дѣйств. (10 картинъ), графа А. К. Толстого

Увертюра „Царь Ѳедоръ", соч. А. А. Ильинскаго: „Пѣснь Гусляра" А. Т. Гречанинов

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[illegible]

The Moscow Art Theatre's first poster, advertising Alexei Tolstoi's *Tsar Fyodor* (1898) through a little window above and falls on the head of the young boyar, Boris Godunov. He seems to be inspired and delivers a wonderful speech that encourages the whole gathering, and the boyars go to beg the Tsar to remain on the throne.

The next scene takes place in the bedchamber of the remorseful sinner, Tsar Ivan. The Tsar finishes his prayers. Exhausted by a sleepless night, he is in the garb of a monk that contrasts with the burning candles, the shining gold and the precious stones of the icon frames. Through the low door one can see the tall black figure that performs the last of the hundreds of genuflections for the night in a condition of extreme exhaustion. Bending low, he comes in through the arched door, with a deathlike face and dull eyes, and falls weakly into an arm-chair near the bed. Light glimmers in the windows. The Tsar hears the boyars coming. He undresses hurriedly and lies down pretending he is dying. The boyars approach his bed on the tips of their toes, surround his bed, silently sink to their knees, bow, touching the floor with their foreheads, and lie motionless on the floor. Ivan does not move, pretending he is asleep. There is a torturing pause. Then a careful, cunning word from Godunov. The supplications of the boyars. The capricious Tsar refuses to accede to their wishes, then finally consents, but on terrible conditions. His thin white foot protrudes from beneath the coverlet. He rises with difficulty. He is helped up and clad in his royal robes; they put the crown on his head and give him his sceptre. The tired, almost dead, dried-up old man grows visibly into the old Ivan the Terrible, with the eyes and the nose of an eagle. In a quiet but piercing voice he pronounces death sentence on Sitsky, who has not dared appear to beg him to return to the throne. There is the ringing of bells. The royal procession passes into the cathedral to pray. Sternly and powerfully in their wake walks one of the wisest and most cruel of the kings of all time, Tsar, Ivan the Terrible.

When we staged *Tsar Fyodor* and *The Death of Ivan the Terrible,* the thing we strove for was to eliminate the theatrical stamp and stencil that were part and parcel of the old Russian plays about boyars and that were most repulsive, boring and contagious. It was enough to touch them and they would envelop you from head to foot, creeping into your mind and heart, ears and eyes. It was imperative to find *new* methods of acting in these plays, new methods that could replace the old. Very often this was accomplished at the expense of the inner content of the play, at the expense of the thing that is the very foundation of art. In our revolutionary zeal we strove for the outward results of creative work, by-passing its first and most important phase—the birth of emotion. In other words we would start with embodiment without having lived through the spiritual content that we had to convey to the audience.

Ignorant of any other way, the actors strove to create an outward image. In our quest for it we donned all sorts of costumes, foot-gear, stuffings; we glued on noses, beards, moustaches, we put on wigs and hats, hoping to strike accidentally on the image—to see how he looked and talked, to feel the body of the image. Our creativeness was based on accident and we spent a series of rehearsals in search of such accidents. But then every cloud has its silver lining: our search proved useful in that it taught the actors to master the *outer characteristics* of the image, and that is a very important aspect of stage art. Together with other outer innovations it served to develop the *costume drama* line in our theatre.

I must confess that in those days I continued to use the old, simple methods of stage direction, i.e., I wrote the *mise-en-scène* and played all the rôles so that the young actors could copy me and fully assimilate my methods. What else could I do? I did not know how to teach others; I only knew how to act—and only by intuition, for I had neither schooling nor discipline. I had a bagful of tricks and methods, but they were in disorder, unsystematized and unclassified, and I could do nothing but shove my hand into the bag and pull out the first thing I touched.

The costume drama line that we had adopted proved extremely successful and became the talk of the town, and we were dubbed a theatre of manners, naturalistic and museum details and spectacle. This misunderstanding has become deeply rooted and persists even now, although in the past 25 years we have gone through various, and contradictory, phases of artistic development and through a series of evolutions and innovations. But public opinion has a peculiarity all its own: when it stares at something, it sees nothing else. The reputation we earned stuck fast to us.

In reality, our theatre has always been different from what people take it to be. It was established and exists for lofty art. The costume drama line was just a transition phase in the process of our development, and was engendered by various circumstances.

The main was that the actors were not ready for big tasks and we concealed their immaturity by the novel costume drama line.

Grown from the seed of Shchepkin's traditions, our theatre always recognized the player as the main factor on the stage. Everything we did was for the actor. In those days the position of the beginners was quite difficult and they badly needed help. Inexperienced as they were, they could not cope with the task given them. The theatre badly needed success, and since our young actors were not mature, we had to conceal their immaturity on the one hand and seek the assistance of our more accomplished colleagues–in other words, entrust them with the greater part of creative work–on the other.

When the theatre had a talented artist, the *pièce de résistance* of any spectacle was its costumes and scenery. Our stage directors stunned the spectators with luxury and novelty that covered up the faults of the inexperienced players. With the aid of these directors and the artist, unnoticeably, we helped our actors and our troupe to mature and score successes.

Our productions were also realistic because, working with a company of inexperienced actors, the directors were compelled to set them the simplest possible creative tasks based on everyday life with which they were well acquainted. It is only natural that this led to the strengthening of the costume drama line in our theatre.

Another thing that served the same goal was our revolutionary zeal. Our slogan then was:

"Down with the old! Long live the new!"

Our young actors, inexperienced as they were, deprecated the old without having come to know it. We set at nought both the theatre and the actor of the old school, we spoke only of the creation of a new art. This mood was especially strong in the first phase–probably because we thought it justified our methods and our right to existence.

What did we consider the most novel, unexpected and revolutionary in those days when tradition ruled supreme in most theatres?

To the surprise of our contemporaries, we thought it was our spiritual realism, the truth of artistic emotion, artistic feeling. These are the most difficult things in our art, things that require a lengthy period of emotional spade-work.

Revolutionaries, however, are an impatient lot. They long to change the old as fast as possible, to see the clear, convincing and, naturally, effective results of their revolution and victories, to create a new art of their own as soon as possible.

The outward, material truth strikes one's eye before anything else; one sees and feels it immediately–and takes it as an achievement of genuine art, as a successful discovery, as a victory of the new over the old. Having hit upon outward realism, we took this path of least resistance.

I must say in all fairness that, unknown perhaps even to ourselves, behind the mistakes we then committed lay a very important thing, the foundation of any art–the effort to achieve *genuine artistic truth.* This artistic truth was then of an outward nature: it was the truth of things, furniture, costumes, properties, lighting effects, sound effects, outward image and outward physical life. But the very fact that we had succeeded in achieving a genuine, though purely outward artistic truth on the stage–at a time when theatrical falsehood reigned supreme–that very fact opened certain prospects for the future.

THE LINE OF THE FANTASTIC

THE LINE of the fantastic includes such plays as *The Snow Maiden* and *The Blue Bird.*

The fantastic on the stage is an old passion of mine. If there is fantasy in a play, I confess I am ready to produce it just for the sake of the fantasy. For fantasy is interesting, beautiful, amusing. To me it is relaxation, a little joke, which is now and then so necessary to the actor. As the French chansonette has it:

"De temps en temps il faut
*Prendre un verre de Cliquot."**

And for me the fantastic is like a glass of sparkling champagne. This is why I enjoyed so much producing *The Snow Maiden* and *The Blue Bird.* It

* *One should take now and then*
A glass of Cliquot champagne.

was not only the fantasy that attracted me, of course: in *The Snow Maiden* there is an exceptionally beautiful Russian epos, and in *The Blue Bird* an artistically interpreted symbol.

It is engaging to invent something that never happens in life, but it is nevertheless a truth that lives in men and nations.

The Snow Maiden is a fairy-tale, a dream, a national legend, written in a remarkably ringing verse by Ostrovsky. One might well believe that Ostrovsky, who has always been called a realist and a dramatist of manners, had never written anything but beautiful poetry and had never been interested in anything but pure poetry and romanticism.

Let me sketch a few moments of this production, for instance, the prologue, which takes place on a wooded mountain covered with snow-drifts. The trees and bushes are thickest below, near the footlights. Winter and frost have deprived them of their foliage, and now their dry, black branches crackle and wheeze and intertwine in the gusts of the rushing wind. From the forestage to the very end of the backstage there is a continually rising incline that is as wide as the stage itself, with all sorts of rising and falling platforms. All this is piled with hay-stuffed bags that give the impression of the uneven surface of the snow. The snow lies in masses on the trees and on the bushes, bending them to the ground with its weight.

In the distance one can hear a crowd singing. These are the inhabitants of a happy village in the kingdom of Berendei come to celebrate Shrovetide in their pagan fashion, carrying its straw image. The merry crowd of singing and dancing children, old men and women, roll down the mountain side, rise and dance around the straw image which they later burn. Only a few couples are left to do their love-making before Lent sets in, and they hide among the snow-bound trees and kiss to their hearts' content. But now they too run away with laughter. A solemn silence falls on the mysterious forest, the wind grows stronger, bringing a snow-storm, and soon from the distance comes a symphony of incomprehensible sounds. It is Grandfather Frost who is approaching. One can hear his booming voice from far away and the wild answers of the beasts, the trees and the wood sprites.

Meanwhile, on the very forestage, densely covered with bare bushes, the branches come to life, beating against each other like hundreds of fingers. There are crackling, wheezing, and moaning sounds, and then a whole family of sprites appears. They had been hidden in the bushes, or rather, they were the bushes. Now they seem to rise from the heart of the earth itself, grow into some unusual creatures with shapeless, crooked, bark-covered bodies, with square heads that look like stumps, with snags and curved branches protruding everywhere and two huge formless boughs for hands. Some of these creatures are thin and big like dried trees, covered with gray moss that looks like the beards and gray hair of old men; others are fat, with long hair and look like women; and still others are small like children. They all grow to their full height, run about, as if looking for someone on the forestage. These sprites create the impression that the forest has come to life, and the altogether unexpected scenic effect frightened the women who sat in the first rows of the auditorium.

The fantastic is good only when the spectator does not understand at once how the effect is created. And this time it was hard to guess right away that the bushes along the forestage were nothing but supernumeraries in costumes.

An awakened bear stuck his head out of his den and crawled out amidst the running wood sprites, black and tremendous and furry against the white background of the snow.

The illusion was complete and it was impossible to guess how such a lifelike animal was made on the stage. It was not in vain that the actor who sweated in the bearskin had long studied his rôle in the zoological garden, watching the life of bears in their cages. The snow-drift hid the bottom part of his body and his legs, and the human figure could not be noticed at all because those parts that might have betrayed themselves were covered with white fur and blended with the background.

Meanwhile the noise grew to larger and larger proportions in the distance. In order to judge of the noise created, I will take the reader backstage with me. Imagine the entire cast, actors and supernumeraries, choristers, musicians, stage hands, office help, and many of the administrators of the theatre in full meeting. Each of them was given three or four peculiar instruments—whistles, castanets, and other devices, many of them invented by ourselves, for the purpose of making strange noises—moans and groans, shrieks and howls. There were something like seventy persons, each playing on three or four of these instruments. Some of them were even able to use their feet, pressing down specially arranged boards which creaked and moaned like ancient trees. When the forte of this orchestra of some 250 instruments reached its highest note, a snow-storm of white confetti was blown by large ventilators on to the stage from the top of the right wing. At the back of this were long streamers of many-toned tulle fastened at one end to sticks. Amidst this snow-storm there appeared the colossal figure of Grandfather Frost in a huge white hat with a tremendous white beard, dressed in a magnificent costume decorated in the Eastern style with many-coloured fur. With a wild shout he rolled down to the forestage, then made himself comfortable on a snow-drift. There he was met by his laughing daughter, Snow Maiden, and the black bear who tried to kiss him, but the mischievous girl mounted the beast and rolled with him in the snow.

And here is another scene from my production of *The Snow Maiden.*

The palace of Tsar Berendei, the aesthete, philosopher, patron of arts, youths and their passionate and pure love for the beautiful maidens of the kingdom of Berendei whose hearts the god Yarila sets on fire in spring. The tsar is busy decorating his palace. Together with his ministers and courtiers Berendei is in one of the halls from which there opens a splendid view of his naïvely blissful kingdom. The entire wall on the left–columns, corners of houses–is covered with scaffolding. Decorative work is going on everywhere. Perched atop an elevation near the main column supporting the roof, the tsar himself is painting a beautiful flower. Below him, on the floor, sits his Prime Minister Bermyata. The sleeves and flaps of his Byzantine mantle are rolled up and he is covering the panel of the porch with a thick layer of paint. Along the footlights, on a long, thick log left over from construction, sit blind musicians, story-tellers and minstrels who sing hymns to the tsar and the sun, to the accompaniment of village horns, flutes, pipes and lyres with rotating wheels that scrape across the strings. The church-like singing adds to the solemnity on the stage. Above, hanging from the ceiling, are two large cradles with two old bearded icon painters. Armed like the tsar, with brushes, they are painting exquisite patterns. Then comes the exceptionally beautiful voice of Tsar Berendei (the rôle is played by Vasily Kachalov, making his début), philosophizing about lofty things, about love and his lost youth. The tsar learns that Snow Maiden appeared in the village, that Mizgir, the guest from the East, has forgotten his betrothed Kupava and fallen in love with

Scene from the second act of Ostrovsky's *The Snow Maiden* (1900)

her. A horrible crime! To wound a maid's heart, to betray an oath! In the patriarchal kingdom of kind-hearted Berendei this is an unpardonable sin.

"Gather the people to hear the tsar's judgement!" he commands. "Call the criminal!"

To the accompaniment of music, Kupava complains and weeps at the tsar's feet while he changes into magnificent church-like robes–sewn especially for the production by two actresses, Maria Lilina and Maria Grigoryeva.

At this moment, an original orchestra–something like the one we heard in the Kremlin at Rostov–strikes up, only there it was made up solely of bells and here of wooden boards. The bigger boards took the place of bass bells. There were boards of all sizes, with the smallest to represent the tiniest bells. The orchestra had a rhythm all its own, its own melody. Special music had been written for it and there had been special rehearsals. The "melody" was interspersed with musically arranged cries–the shouts of town-criers, typical recitatives, ornamental graces, original cadences, like the ones used by street vendors, deacons, professional mourners and psalm-readers. We placed the town-criers all around the stage and in the wings, so that their voices would blend well—the basses thundered, the tenors sang buoyantly. Sometimes the tenors and the altos sang in unison, and then gave way to bass voices. Some were perched on the roof of Berendei's palace or in its attic, looking down they shouted right at the audience.

The din and the shouts of the town-criers gradually brought the people on to the stage. They came as if to a temple, their hands pressed together as in prayer. The trial scene was on, ending with glory being sung to Berendei. And in the meantime, Snow Maiden, who was responsible for everything, rushed innocently about the stage, poking the brush into tins of paint and daubing everything she saw. Then, tiring of this prank, she thought up a new one and, like a child, fearlessly approached the tsar and played with his jewelled buttons, while Berendei caressed the beautiful head of this half-child, half-woman.

The story of this act reminds me of an interesting episode. I shall relate it because it takes us into the innermost recesses of one's creative soul and shows us all its processes.

At one of the rehearsals I sat admiring the icon painters who were hanging in their cradles. I was in a good mood and my imagination was working well. But, after hanging for hours, the icon painters "went on strike." Indeed, it was not easy to swing in a cradle all through the rehearsal. They were taken down and the ceiling became empty. I felt weak like Samson after he had lost his hair. I lost all my buoyancy. It was no whim, it was against my will. I tried to revive myself, to stimulate my imagination, but all in vain. Finally the icon painters took pity on me, the cradles were hung up, the men took up their places, and I revived. Strange, isn't it? Why, I wonder.

Many years later I visited the Vladimir Cathedral in Kiev. It was empty at the time, but I heard someone singing a hymn. I recalled that many years before that, before we had started rehearsing *The Snow Maiden,* when the cathedral was still in construction, I went there to see V. Vasnetsov.[41] The cathedral seemed deserted then. Brilliant sun-rays, falling from under the dome, lighted up the centre of the cathedral and the gilded frames of the icons. It was quiet except for the singing of the icon painters, gray-bearded, and hanging suspended in cradles. This was what gave me the idea when I staged *The Snow Maiden.*

The Snow Maiden was memorable because it marked the début of Vasily Kachalov, an excellent actor who gradually became extremely popular and one of the greatest performers in the country.

There were also splendid performances by Maria Lilina (as Snow Maiden) and by Ivan Moskvin and Maria Samarova. The music, especially composed by Grechaninov, was excellent.[42]

Yet, the play was not a success. It deserved a better fate. One of the reasons why it was not successful may be that the scenery in the last two acts was too big for the stage and required too long an interval for its arrangement, and because of that we staged both acts with the same scenery. This mixed up all the *mises-en-scène* and compelled us to effect some cuts in the play.

SYMBOLISM AND IMPRESSIONISM

CONTINUING TO REACT to all that was new, we paid special tribute to the fashionable influence of *symbolism* and *impressionism* then prevailing in literature. Nemirovich-Danchenko may not have cultivated love for Ibsen in our theatre, but he certainly succeeded in arousing our interest. For years he staged his plays—*Hedda Gabler, When We Dead Awaken, The Ghost, Brand, Rosmersholm, Peer Gynt.* I staged only two of Ibsen's plays —*The Enemy of the People (Dr. Stockman)* and *The Wild Duck,* both of them under the literary guidance of Nemirovich-Danchenko.

For us actors *symbolism* was a hard nut to crack. To stage symbolical plays successfully, it is necessary to know the rôle and the play perfectly, to understand its spiritual contents, to crystallize its essence, to polish the crystal, to find a clear, bright and artistic form for it, synthesizing all the multiform and complex contents of the play. We were too inexperienced for such a task and, moreover, we lacked the necessary technique. Experts claimed that our actors failed because our art was too realistic and this, they said, was contrary to symbolism. In reality, the reason was exactly opposite: in the case of Ibsen we were not sufficiently realistic.

Symbolism, impressionism and all the other subtle *isms* in art belong to superconsciousness and begin where the ultra-natural ends. But it is only when the actor's spiritual and physical life on the stage develops *naturally,* normally, according to the laws of nature, that the superconscious leaves its innermost recesses. The least violence against nature forces the superconscious to hide in the innermost recesses of the soul, seeking safety from crude muscular anarchy.

In those days we did not know how to work up a natural and normal mood on the stage. We did not know how to create in our souls the favourable soil necessary for superconsciousness. We philosophized too much, we were too clever. Our symbol was from reason and not from feeling, affected and not natural. In brief, we did not know how to turn the spiritual realism of our plays into a symbol.

True, sometimes, accidentally, for some unknown reason, we would become inspired. For instance, at the dress rehearsal of *Hedda Gabler* I was enthusiastic and carried away by Lövborg's tragedy, when, having lost the manuscript, he lives the last few desperate moments before committing suicide.

With me, as with my colleagues, these happy moments were accidental, and accident, of course, cannot serve as a foundation of art.

But, perhaps, there was another reason, of a purely national character, that made Ibsen's symbol difficult for us to understand. Perhaps "Rosmersholm's white horses" will never be as near to us as the legend about Elijah's chariot and his thundering passage across the sky on the stormy day of Elijah.

Perhaps Chekhov was right when one day he suddenly burst out laughing and, unexpectedly as always, exclaimed:

"Listen, Artyom can never play Ibsen!"

And true enough, Ibsen the Norwegian and Artyom the typical Russian just didn't go together.

Didn't Chekhov's profound exclamation apply as well to us, the newly-baked symbolists and Ibsenists?

INTUITION AND FEELING

The Sea-Gull

ANOTHER SERIES of productions and plays followed the line of intuition and feelings. Here I would include all the plays by Chekhov, many of the plays by Hauptmann, *Wit Works Woe,* the plays by Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and others.

The first play in this series was Chekhov's *The Sea-Gull.*

I do not dare take upon myself the description of Chekhov's plays. Their charm does not lie in the dialogue; it lies in the meaning behind this dialogue, in the pauses, in the looks of the actors, in the way they display emotions. Everything comes to life in these plays: the properties, the sounds, the scenery, the images created by the players, the play itself. Here it is a case of creative intuition and artistic feeling.

It was Chekhov who suggested to me the line of intuition and feeling. To reveal the inner contents of his plays it is necessary to delve into the depths of his soul. That, of course, applies to every play with a deep spiritual content, but most of all to Chekhov, for there are no other ways in his case. All the theatres in Russia and a great many in Europe tried to interpret Chekhov with old methods of acting. And the result? They failed. There is no theatre and no production that has shown Chekhov successfully by employing the usual theatrical methods, and this despite the fact that his plays have been tackled by the best actors of the world, actors whose talent, technique and experience have never been questioned. The Art Theatre is the only one to have succeeded where the others have failed, and that at a time when its players were not yet mature. The reason is that we have discovered a new approach to Chekhov, an altogether different approach, and that is our main contribution to dramatic art.

Chekhov's plays at first sight do not reveal their poetic depth. After reading them you say:

"Good. But there is nothing extraordinary, nothing amazing. Everything is just where it should be; we know what it is, it is true, but it is not new."

Scene from the fourth act of Chekhov's The Sea-Gull (1905)

First acquaintance with his plays is often disappointing. It even seems that there is nothing to say about them after they are read. The plot and the subject can be summed up in a few words. Rôles? There are many good ones, but there are none that would attract the actor who plays only good rôles (there are actors like that). The other rôles are little ones; they can be written on one sheet of paper. One remembers a few words, a few scenes. But strange, the more rein one gives to one's memory, the more one wants to think about the play. The inner force of some places compels one to think of other places, of the whole play. You read it again and again, and every time you make new discoveries.

I have played some of Chekhov's characters hundreds of times, but I do not recall a single performance that has not aroused new feelings in me, that has not led to the discovery of new depths and subtleties.

Chekhov is inexhaustible because, notwithstanding the everyday life that they describe, the plots of his plays are not about casual, petty things, but about Man with a capital M.

That is why his dream of future life on earth is not petty and narrow-minded, but on the contrary broad, big and ideal—a dream that will probably remain unrealized, a dream that must be striven for, even though it is impossible to achieve.

Chekhov's dreams of future life speak of lofty spirit, of the World's Soul, of the Man who does not want "three *arshins** of earth" but the whole of the earth, of the wonderful life for whose achievement we must work, sweat and suffer two hundred, three hundred and even a thousand years.

All this is from the realm of the eternal which cannot but arouse one's excitement.

Chekhov's plays are extremely effective, but not in their outward development–they are effective by their inner development. The very inactivity of his characters conceals complex inner activity. He has shown better than anyone else that one should understand the inner significance of stage action, and that it is only on this inner significance, cleansed of all staginess, that one can found and build a dramatic play. While outer action entertains and excites, inner action affects and captivates our soul. It is better still, of course, if the play has both, i.e., inner and outer actions closely blended together, for the play only gains thereby, in fullness and scenic value. But however it may be, inner action is the most important. That is why it is wrong to play Chekhov's plots superficially, to present images without bringing out their inner feelings and inner life. Chekhov's plays are interesting for the spiritual value of his characters.

Actors engaged in Chekhov's plays are wrong in trying *to play, to perform.* In his plays they must *be,* i.e., *live, exist,* proceeding along the deep inner line of spiritual development. Here Chekhov is strong in his most variegated, frequently unconscious methods of influence. At times he is an *impressionist,* at others a *symbolist;* where necessary he is a *realist* and sometimes almost a *naturalist.*

Evening. . . . The moon is rising. . . . Two persons, a man and a woman, exchange almost meaningless words, words that show that they are not saying what they feel (Chekhov's characters often do that). In the distance one can hear a pianist playing a tasteless tavern waltz that reminds one of the spiritual wretchedness, pettiness and *cabotinage* of the environment. Suddenly, a moan breaks out of the innermost recesses of the girl's loving heart. And then–one short phrase, an exclamation:

"I can't. . . . I can't. . . . I can't. . . ."

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* *Arshin*–Russian measure of length equal to 28 inches.–*Tr.*

The scene does not say anything formally, but it arouses a mass of associations, reminiscences, uneasy feelings.

Then there is a young man, hopelessly in love, who puts a beautiful white sea-gull that he has killed so meaninglessly at the feet of the woman he loves. It is a magnificent living symbol.

Or the appearance of the prosaic teacher who badgers his wife with one and the same phrase, trying her patience all through the play:

"Let's go home . . . the baby's crying. . . ."

That's realism.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly a disgusting scene of a quarrel between a *cabotin* mother and her idealistic son.

That's almost naturalism.

And in the end, an autumn evening, raindrops beating against the windows, a few people playing cards, a melancholy Chopin waltz in the distance; then it ends. A shot rings out . . . death.

That's impressionism.

Like no one else, Chekhov knows how to choose and convey human moods, intersperse them with everyday life scenes of sharply different character and endow them with sparkling humour. And he does all that not only as an artist with an exquisite taste, but also as a man who possesses the key to the hearts of the actors and spectators.

Imperceptibly changing their mood, he makes people follow him.

Living through each of these moods, one feels that one is in the very midst of the well-known, petty prosiness, in which the soul languishes and from which it seeks a way out. And here Chekhov, unnoticeably to ourselves, reveals his dream, which shows the only way out of the situation, and we hasten to join the poet in seeking its realization.

Having hit upon this deep vein of gold, one follows it and even when one emerges to the surface, one continues to feel its influence in the dialogue and action of the play.

To an inexperienced eye it may appear that Chekhov indulges in superficialities, in describing unimportant details of life. But all this is necessary only as a contrast to a lofty dream that lives in his soul, that lives in an agony of expectation and hope.

In his plays, Chekhov is master of both outer and inner truth. There is no one who can use lifeless properties, scenery and lighting effects like he does–to make them live. He has shown us the life of things and sounds and lighting which, in the theatre as in life, exert a profound influence on the human soul. Twilight, sunrise and sunset, thunderstorm and rain, the songs of awakening birds, the clatter of horses' hoofs and the rumble of a carriage, the striking of a clock, the stridulation of a cricket, the pealing of bells–Chekhov uses all these not for stage effect, but for the purpose of showing us man's soul. Where is the line dividing us and our feelings from the world of light, sound and things which surround us and on which human psychology so depends? We were ridiculed unjustly for our crickets and other sound and lighting effects, for in using these effects in Chekhov's plays we were only following his numerous instructions. And if we sometimes did this well, and not badly or theatrically, we deserved praise and not ridicule.

Without all that, it would have been difficult indeed to create inner truth on the stage, to create true feelings and emotions amidst the obtrusive and crude falsehoods of the theatre.

Skilful as only a real master can be, Chekhov knows how to kill inner and outer theatrical falsehood with the aid of beautiful, artistic and genuine truth. He is very particular in his love of truth. He has no use for banal, common, superficial emotions, nor for the outworn feelings which we know so well that we have stopped noticing them and which have completely lost their freshness. Chekhov seeks for his truth in the most intimate moods, in the innermost recesses of the soul. This truth excites one by its unexpectedness, by its mysterious ties with the forgotten past, by its inexplicable presentiment about the future, its particular logic of life in which, it seems, there is no common sense and which scoffs and gibes at people, nonplusses them or makes them laugh.

All these inexpressible moods, presentiments, hints, aromas and shades of feelings emerge from the depth of one's soul where they are in contact with our emotions–religious feelings, conscience, the lofty feeling of truth and justice, our keen desire to know the mysteries of life. All this seems to be imbued with explosive elements and it remains only for some impression or reminiscence to drop a spark into this depth for our soul to catch fire.

In Chekhov's plays, moreover, all these feelings are saturated with the unfading poeticalness of Russian life. They are extremely near and dear to us, irresistibly charming and that is why one falls so readily under their influence. After that it is impossible not to feel these emotions.

To play Chekhov it is above all necessary to find his gold-bearing vein, to surrender to his feeling of truth, to his charm, to believe him–and then, together with the poet, to proceed along the spiritual line of his play to the hidden doors of one's own artistic superconsciousness. It is in these innermost recesses of the soul that the "Chekhov mood" is created–the vessel that contains all the invisible and often ununderstandable riches and values of Chekhov's soul.

The techniques of this complex inner work and the paths to creative superconsciousness are many and different. Nemirovich-Danchenko and I approached Chekhov and his hidden riches each in his own way: Vladimir Ivanovich by the artistic, literary road of the writer, and I by the road of the actor, the road of images. At first, these different ways and approaches to the play were a hindrance. There were lengthy arguments which passed from arguments about details to arguments about principles, from the rôle to the play and art in general. There were even quarrels, but these quarrels were always of artistic origin and for that reason they were more useful than dangerous because they taught us to delve into the very essence of art. As far as the difference of our approach and the division of our work in the theatre–literary and artistic–were concerned, they soon disappeared: we convinced ourselves that it was impossible to separate *form* from *content*, to separate the literary, psychological or social aspect of a play from the images, *mises-en-scène* and scenery which all go to form the artistry of a production.

However, to achieve artistic results in our collective endeavour it was necessary to rally our artistic forces. We needed: 1) such a writer, dramatist and teacher as Vladimir Ivanovich; 2) a stage director who was free of hackneyed theatrical conventionalities, who was capable of bringing out the mood of the poet and his spirit on the stage with the aid of *mises-en-scène*, methods of acting, new lighting and sound effects; 3) an artist who was spiritually close to Chekhov, as Victor Simov was.

Finally, we needed talented young actors with modern training. Here we had Olga Knipper, Maria Lilina, Ivan Moskvin, Vasily Kachalov, Vsevolod

Meierhold, Vasily Luzhsky, Vladimir Gribunin and others. The directors did everything to help the young actors and show them the right path to art. We had various outward means at our disposal, the means usually at the disposal of the director–scenery, *mises-en-scène*, lighting, sound effects, music –and with their aid it was comparatively easy to create *outer mood.*

Very often this mood influenced the actors. They felt outer truth, thought of their own life and these reminiscences evoked feelings of which Chekhov spoke. In such moments the actor stopped playing; he began to live the rôle, became the character he was portraying. This character naturally reflected the soul of the actor. Another person's words and actions became the actor's words and actions. *It was a creative miracle.* It was that most important and necessary mystery of the soul for which it is well worth to make sacrifices, endure, suffer and work in our art.

While the *costume drama line* brought us to *outer realism,* the *line of intuition and feelings* showed us the way to *inner realism.* And thence we automatically proceeded to organic creation whose mysterious processes take place in the sphere of artistic superconsciousness. It begins where outer and inner realism ends. It is the path of intuition and feelings–from the outer via the inner to the superconscious, a path that is not the most correct, but possible. In those days it was one of the basic paths, at least in my art.

The conditions under which we produced *The Sea-Gull* were complex and hard.

Chekhov was ill with a new attack of tuberculosis. His spiritual condition was such that if *The Sea-Gull* should fail as it did when first staged in Petersburg, he would not be able to bear the blow. Another failure could prove fatal. His sister Maria Pavlovna warned us of this with tears in her eyes, when, on the eve of the performance, she begged us to postpone it. But we needed the production because business was in a bad way and to improve our material position we had to stage something new. You can judge of the condition in which we actors played on the first night before a small audience. There were only six hundred rubles in the box-office. When we were on the stage there was an inner whisper in our hearts:

"You must play well, you must play better than well; you must create not only success, but triumph, for if you do not, the man and writer you love will die, killed by your hands."

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Trigorin and Olga Knipper as Arkadina in Chekhov's *The Sea-Gull* (1898)

I do not remember how we played. The first act was over. There was a grave-like silence. One of the actresses fainted on the stage. I myself could hardly keep on my feet from despair. Suddenly there was a roar in the auditorium. The curtain parted, closed, parted again, showing the whole auditorium our amazed and astounded immovability. It closed again, it parted; it closed, it parted, and we could not even gather sense enough to bow. Then there were congratulations and embraces like those of Easter night, and ovations to Maria Lilina, who played Masha, and who had broken the ice with her last words. Success grew with each act and ended in triumph.

We were no longer afraid of sending a telegram to Chekhov.

The biggest success was scored by Olga Knipper (Arkadina) and Maria Lilina (Masha). In fact, the play brought them fame.

Excellent performances were given by Vasily Luzhsky (Sorin), Alexander Artyom (Shamrayev), Vsevolod Meierhold (Treplev) and Alexander

Vishnevsky (Dorn). The play revealed that we had many really talented actors who gradually helped us to build up a well-knit troupe.

Chekhov's name is closely linked with that of the late Nikolai Efros, theatrical critic and one of the most ardent admirers of his creative talent. At the *première* of *The Sea-Gull* he was the first to rush to the footlights–he climbed up on to a chair and began to applaud wildly. He was the first to laud Chekhov as a playwright and the actors and our theatre for staging the play. He became a close friend of our theatre, gave it a piece of his big, loving heart and remained its admirer and champion all his life–and the theatre will always be grateful for that.

CHEKHOV'S ARRIVAL—"UNCLE VANYA"

ILLNESS PREVENTED Anton Chekhov from coming to Moscow during the season. But in the spring of 1899 he arrived with the intention of seeing *The Sea-Gull,* and demanded that we stage it for him.

"Listen, it is necessary for me. I am its author. How can I write anything else until I have seen it?" he repeated at every favourable opportunity.

What were we to do? The season was over, the theatre was in the hands of strangers for all of the summer, the scenery and props had been taken away and stored in a small barn. A special performance for Chekhov required going through almost the same amount of work we did preparing for a whole season, that is, hiring a theatre and stage hands to unpack the scenery, the properties, the costumes, the wigs, and bringing them to the theatre, recalling the actors, rehearsing the play, putting in the necessary lighting system, and so on. And the result–a probable failure, for it was impossible to arrange the play in a hurry. There was the fear that our inexperienced actors, not being used to a new stage, would lose themselves completely, and that would be the worst thing that could happen, especially to a Chekhov play. Besides, the theatre we hired looked like a barn: all the furniture was removed because the theatre was about to be renovated The play would have no appeal in an empty theatre And Chekhov would be disappointed But Chekhov's request was a law to us, and we could not refuse him

The special performance took place in the Nikitsky Theatre and was attended by Chekhov and about ten other spectators The impression, as we had expected, was only middling After every act Chekhov would run on to the stage, his face bearing no sign of joy But as soon as he would see the backstage activities, he would regain his courage and smile, for he loved backstage life He praised some of the actors and criticized others This was especially true of one actress, with whose work Chekhov was completely dissatisfied.

"Listen," he said, "she can't act in my play. You have another actress who could be much better in the part, who is excellent."

"But how can we take the part away from her?" we defended the actress. "That would be

Stanislavsky as Astrov in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (1899) tantamount to throwing her out of the company. Think what a blow that would be!"

"Listen, I shall take the play away from you," he countered, almost cruelly, surprising us by his hardness and firmness. Notwithstanding his exceptional tenderness, delicacy and kindness, he was severe and merciless in questions of art and never accepted any compromises.

In order not to anger and excite the sick man, we did not contradict him, hoping that with time he would forget the whole thing. But no. Unexpectedly, when no one even dreamt that he would say it, Chekhov would repeat:

"Listen, she can't act in my play."

At the special performance he obviously avoided me. I waited for him in my dressing-room, but he did not come. That was an ill omen. I went to him myself.

"Scold me, Anton Pavlovich," I begged him.

"Wonderful! Listen, it was wonderful! Only you need torn shoes and checked trousers."

He would tell me no more. What did it mean? He did not wish to express his opinion? Was it a trick to get rid of me? Was he laughing at me? Trigorin in *The Sea-Gull* was a young writer, a favourite with the women–and suddenly he was to wear torn shoes and checked trousers! I played the part in the most elegant of costumes–white trousers, white vest, white hat, new shoes–and had a handsome make-up.

A year or more passed. I was again playing the part of Trigorin–and during one of the performances I suddenly understood what Chekhov had meant.

"Of course, the shoes must be torn and the trousers checked, and Trigorin must not be handsome. In this lies the salt of the part: for young, inexperienced girls it is important that a man should be a writer and publish sentimental novels, and the Nina Zarechnayas, one after the other, will throw themselves on his neck, without noticing that he is not talented, that he is not handsome, that he wears checked trousers and torn shoes. Only afterwards, when the love affair with such a 'sea-gull' is over, do they begin to understand that it was girlish imagination which created something that did not exist."

The depth and richness of Chekhov's laconic remarks struck me. It was very typical and characteristic of him.

After the success of *The Sea-Gull* many theatres began chasing after Chekhov and negotiating with him for the production of his other play, *Uncle Vanya*. Representatives of various theatres visited him at his home and Anton Pavlovich conducted his business with them behind closed doors. We were disappointed, for we also wanted to produce his play. But one day Chekhov returned home angry and excited. One of the administrators of the theatre to which he had promised his play, even before us, had unwittingly hurt the famous writer. Possibly not knowing what to say, he had asked Anton Pavlovich:

"And what are you doing now?"

"Writing stories, and sometimes plays."

I don't know what happened after that, but at the end of the interview Chekhov was handed a report from the repertoire committee of the theatre that said many flattering things about his play, which was accepted for production. It specified, however, one condition–that the author change the end of the third act, in which the indignant Uncle Vanya shoots at Professor Serebryakov.

Chekhov reddened with indignation when he spoke of the foolishness of the report and burst out laughing when he quoted the protocol. Only Chekhov could laugh unexpectedly at a time when laughter was the last thing expected.

We were inwardly triumphant, for we felt that we had won out, that the fate of *Uncle Vanya* would be decided in our favour. And, of course, in the end the play was given to us, which made Anton Pavlovich himself very happy. We began to work at once. It was first of all necessary to take advantage of his presence to have him explain what he wanted as the author of the play. Strange as it may seem, he never knew what to say about his own plays: he would grow confused, and in order to find a way out of his embarrassment and get rid of us, he always resorted to the following statement:

"Listen, I've written it down; it is all there."

Or he would tell us, "Listen, I shall never write plays again. I received for *The Sea-Gull* quite a bit. . . ."

And he would take a five-kopek piece from his pocket, and showing it to us, would roll with laughter. We would not be able to control ourselves either and would laugh together with him. Our conversation would lose its business character. After a while, we would renew our questions until at last Chekhov would hint at some interesting thought or some typical traits of his characters. For instance, once we were talking about Uncle Vanya himself. Uncle Vanya is a member of the landed gentry who manages Professor Serebryakov's estate. The costume and the general appearance of a landed gentleman are known to all–high boots, a cap, sometimes a horsewhip, for it is taken for granted that he rides horseback a great deal. But Chekhov was against all that.

"Listen," he said greatly excited, "everything is said there. You didn't read the play."

We looked into the original, but found no hint there except for a few words about a silk tie which Uncle Vanya wore.

"Here it is, it is written down," Chekhov tried to persuade us.

"What is written down?" we asked in amazement. "A silk tie?"

"Of course. Listen, he has a wonderful tie; he is an elegant, cultured man. It is not true that our landed gentry walk about in tar-smeared boots. They are well-educated people. They dress well. They order their clothes in Paris. It is all written down."

This insignificant remark reflected the drama of contemporary Russian life: the worthless, useless professor enjoys life and scholarly fame which he does not deserve, he is the idol of Petersburg; he writes foolish, scientific books which the old Voinitskaya reads enthusiastically. In the burst of general enthusiasm even Uncle Vanya himself falls temporarily under his influence, considering him to be a great man, and working unselfishly for him on the estate in order to support his fame. But in the end Serebryakov is shown up as a fraud who occupies a position in life that he has not earned, while talented people like Uncle Vanya and his friend Astrov are forced to rot in the darkest corners of the provinces. One feels like calling real workers to power and to pull down the giftless though famous Serebryakovs from their high posts.

After the talk with Chekhov, I somehow began to associate Uncle Vanya with Chaikovsky.

The casting of the play was difficult. Without taking into account the number of actors and the number of rôles in the play, Chekhov wanted all the parts played by his favourite actors. After being told that this was impossible, he threatened:

"Listen, I will rewrite the end of the third act, and send the play to the repertoire committee."

It is hard to believe now that after the *première* of *Uncle Vanya* we gathered at a restaurant and sat dejectedly because it was generally thought that the play had failed. But time showed we were wrong: the play was recognized; it remained in the theatre's repertoire for more than twenty years and gained wide popularity in Russia, Europe and America.

All the players gave good performances—Olga Knipper, Maria Samarova, Vasily Luzhsky and Alexander Vishnevsky. The most successful were Maria Lilina, Alexander Artyom and I—I played Astrov, a rôle I did not like at first and did not want to play because I had always dreamed of another part, that of Uncle Vanya himself. But Nemirovich-Danchenko subdued my obstinacy and made me love Astrov.

THE JOURNEY TO THE CRIMEA

OUR THEATRE was young, living through its most beautiful and joyful moments. We were going to visit Anton Pavlovich in the Crimea—it was our first tour.[43] We were the heroes of the day, not only in Moscow, but in the Crimea—in Sevastopol and Yalta. We said to ourselves:

"Anton Pavlovich can't visit us because he is sick, but we are going to visit him because we are well. If Mohammed cannot go to the mountain, then the mountain will go to Mohammed."

The actors, their wives, their children, the children's nurses, stage hands, property men, *costumiers and costumières,* wig-makers several carloads of properties and scenery left cold Moscow for the sun of the South. Take off your fur coats, take out your summer clothes, your straw hats! It does not matter that you will freeze a day or two on the way—you will be warm when you arrive. We were to travel two days and nights. A whole carriage was placed at our disposal. All this makes one happy and gay when one is young and spring is in the air. I cannot describe the practical jokes, the humorous scenes, the comic events of that journey. We sang, joked and made many friends.

Bakhchisarai–a warm spring morning, flowers, the bright costumes of the Tatars, their picturesque head-dress, the sun. And then white Sevastopol. There are few cities in the world more beautiful than Sevastopol. White sand, white houses, chalk mountains, blue sky, blue sea with foaming waves, white clouds, a blinding sun and white sea-gulls. But after a few hours the sky was covered with dark clouds, the sea blackened, the wind rose, there was sleet, and the never-ending sound of an ominous siren. It was winter again. And poor Anton Pavlovich was supposed to make a sea journey from Yalta in such weather to see us. But we waited for him in vain; and it was in vain, too, that we looked for him when the steamer arrived. Chekhov had not come, but there was a telegram from him. He had had another attack of illness, and was not sure that he could come to Sevastopol.

The summer theatre in which we were to play stood gloomily on the shore of the sea, its doors boarded up. The boards had not been taken off all winter, and when the doors were opened and we entered, it seemed to us that we had suddenly been transplanted to the North Pole, for such was the coldness and dampness that greeted us. Our company of young actors met daily in the square in front of the theatre before rehearsals. The well-known critic Sergei Vasilyev was with us. He had come to report on our tour.

"This was the way Goldoni travelled with his own critics," Vasilyev said, explaining his rôle to our troupe.

It became warm again at Easter. Chekhov arrived unexpectedly. He attended the morning meetings of the theatre in the city gardens. Once, hearing that we were looking for a doctor to attend our sick actor Artyom, whom Chekhov loved very much and for whom he later wrote two roles: in *The Three Sisters* (Chebutykin) and in *The Cherry Orchard,* Anton Pavlovich cried out:

"Listen, I am the doctor of this theatre!"

He was very proud of his medical calling, much more than of his talents as a writer.

"My real profession is medicine, but I sometimes write in my spare time," he would say very seriously. He attended the sick actor and prescribed valerian drops, the same prescription jestingly made by his Doctor Dorn in *The Sea-Gull.*

Scene from the first act of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (1899)

The night of the first performance arrived. We showed Chekhov and Sevastopol *Uncle Vanya.* The performance was unusually successful The author was called before the curtain several times. This time Chekhov was satisfied with the performance. He saw our company for the first time in proper environment. In the intermissions he came into my dressing-room to praise me, and in the end he made only one remark about the scene where Astrov goes away

"He whistles. Listen, he whistles! Uncle Vanya is crying, but Astrov whistles!" Again, I could not get any more out of him.

"How is that?" I said to myself. "Sadness, hopelessness, and merry whistling?"

I recalled his remark at one of the later performances. Believing in what Chekhov said, I whistled. What was going to happen? I felt at once that the whistle was truthful, that Astrov must whistle. Uncle Vanya loses heart and becomes gloomy, but Astrov whistles. He has lost his faith in men and life to such an extent that he has become a cynic. Nothing moves him any more. But luckily, he loves nature and serves it without thought of reward, he plants forests, and the forests preserve humidity for the rivers.

At the time of our visit to the Crimea, Anton Pavlovich was most enthusiastic about Hauptmann's *Lonely Lives*. He saw it for the first time and he liked it more than any of his own plays.

"He is a real dramatist. I am not a dramatist. Listen, I am a doctor."

From Sevastopol we went to Yalta, where we were awaited by almost the entire Russian literary world, which seemed to have come especially for the purpose of seeing us in the Crimea. Bunin, Kuprin, Mamin-Sibiryak, Chirikov, Stanyukovich, Yelpatyevsky, and the new sensation, Maxim Gorky, who lived in the Crimea because of weak lungs, were all there. It was here that we first met Gorky, whom we tried to persuade to write plays for us. One day, he told me the story of *The Lower Depths*, a new play he was planning.

Besides the writers there were many actors and musicians, among them the young and much promising Rachmaninov.

Daily, at a certain hour, all the actors and writers met at Chekhov's summerhouse, where lunch would be served. The hostess was our mutual friend, Maria Pavlovna, the famous writer's only sister. The head of the table was occupied by Chekhov's mother, a charming old lady whom everybody liked. After listening to the stories of Chekhov's success as a playwright, she announced her desire to go to the theatre—not to see us, of course, but her son's play. On the day she was going to the theatre I came to Chekhov before lunch and found him greatly excited. It seems that his mother had taken out an ancient silk dress and wanted to wear it to the theatre. Anton Pavlovich was horrified.

"Imagine! Mother in her silk dress watching the play of her Antosha. Listen, that must not happen!"

And right on the spot, after this heated exclamation, he burst into happy, contagious laughter because the picture of his mother in her silk dress, applauding her son, who had written a play and went to the theatre to bow to the public, seemed too funny to him and over-sentimental.

We met daily for lunch in Chekhov's house and there was always much talk of literature. These discussions by the best of specialists revealed many important and interesting—especially for the stage director and actor—secrets, of which the dry pedagogues who teach the history of literature are not even aware. Chekhov tried to persuade everybody to write plays for the Art

Theatre. One day someone mentioned that one of Chekhov's stories could easily be dramatized. The book was brought and Ivan Moskvin was asked to read the story. His reading impressed Anton Pavlovich so much that from that time on he daily asked the talented actor to read something after lunch. This is the secret of how Ivan Moskvin became the sworn reader of Chekhov's stories at all charitable concerts.

Our journey to the Crimea came to an end. As a reward for our visit, Chekhov and Gorky each promised to write a play for us. Speaking between ourselves, that was one of the chief reasons why the mountain had gone to Mohammed.

"THE THREE SISTERS"

NOW, AFTER the success of both of Chekhov's plays, our theatre could not get along without a new play from his pen. The fate of the theatre from that time on was in his hands; if he gave us a play we would have another season, if he didn't the theatre would lose all of its prestige. We were, naturally, interested in how he was working. The latest news about him came from Olga Knipper. We wondered why she knew everything so well, why she spoke so much of his health, of the weather in the Crimea, of how the play was getting on, of whether or not Chekhov would come to Moscow.

" 'Aha,' said we, Pyotr Ivanovich and I."*

At last, to our joy, Anton Pavlovich sent the first act of the new play, still unnamed. Then there arrived the second act and the third. Only the last act was missing. Finally Chekhov came himself with the fourth act, and a reading of the play was arranged, with the author present. A large cloth-covered table was placed in the foyer of the theatre and we all sat down around it, the author and the stage directors being in the centre. All the members of the company, the ushers, some of the stage hands and even a tailor or two were present. We were all in high spirits. The author was apparently excited and felt out of place in the chairman's seat. Now and then he would leap from his chair and walk about, especially at those moments when the dialogue, in his opinion, took a false or unpleasant direction. Discussing the play, some of us called it a drama, and others even a tragedy, without noticing that these definitions amazed Chekhov. One of the speakers, who had a self-evident Eastern accent and tried to display his eloquence, began to speak of his impressions with pathos and the common vocabulary of a tried orator:

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* A quotation from Gogol's *The Inspector-General.*

"Although I do not agree with the author in principle, still–"

Anton Pavlovich could not stand this "in principle." He sneaked out of the theatre. We saw that he had gone, but did not realize what had happened, and thought that he felt ill. After the meeting I went at once to his house and found him not only out of spirits and hurt, but angry. I do not remember ever seeing him so angry again.

"It is impossible. Listen–'in principle'. . ." he exclaimed, imitating the orator.

The commonplace phrase must have made Anton Pavlovich lose his patience. But the real reason was that he thought he had written a merry comedy and all of us had taken it for a tragedy and even wept over it. Evidently Chekhov thought that the play had been misunderstood and that it was already a failure.

The work of stage direction began. As was the custom Nemirovich-Danchenko took care of the literary side and I wrote a detailed *mise-en-scène* –who must cross to where and why, what he must feel, what he must do, how he must look, etc.

The actors worked with spirit. We rehearsed the play, everything was clear, understandable, true, but the play was not lively, it was hollow, it seemed tiresome and long. There was *something* missing. How torturing it is to seek this *something* without knowing what it is. All was ready, it was necessary to advertise the production, but if it were to be staged in the form we had achieved, we were faced with certain failure. Yet, we felt that there were elements that augured great success, that everything with the exception of that magic *something* was there. We met daily, we rehearsed to a point of despair, we parted company, and next day we would meet again and reach despair once more.

As Vershinin in Chekhov's
The Three Sisters (1901)

"Friends, this all happens because we are trying to be smart," someone suddenly decided. "We are dragging the thing out, we are playing bores on the stage. We must lift the tone and play in quick tempo, as in vaudeville."

We began to play quickly, that is, we tried to speak and move swiftly, and this forced us to crumple up the action, to lose part of the dialogue. The result was that the play became worse and more tiresome. It was hard to understand what was taking place on the stage and of what the actors were talking.

One evening at one of our agonizing rehearsals, the actors stopped in the middle of the play, ceased to act, seeing no sense in their work. They no longer had any trust in the stage director or in each other. Such a breakdown usually leads to demoralization. Two or three electric lights were burning dimly. We sat in the corners, crestfallen. We felt anxious and helpless. Someone was nervously scratching the bench. The sound was like that of a mouse. It reminded me of home: I felt warm inside, I saw the truth, life, and my intuition set to work. Or, maybe, the sound of the scratching mouse and the darkness and helplessness had some meaning for me in life, a meaning I myself do not understand. Who can trace the path of creative superconsciousness?

I came to life and knew what it was I had to show the actors. It became cosy on the stage. Chekhov's men revived. They do not bathe in their own sorrow. On the contrary, they seek joy, laughter and cheerfulness. They want to live and not vegetate. I felt the truth in Chekhov's heroes, this encouraged me and I guessed what had to be done.

We resumed rehearsal and all worked enthusiastically. Only Olga Knipper still had some trouble with her Masha, and Nemirovich-Danchenko coached her. At one of the rehearsals something seemed to open in her soul and her rôle began to progress excellently.

Poor Anton Pavlovich did not wait for the first night. He left Russia, giving his failing health as an excuse for going. I think there was another reason also–his anxiety about the play. This suspicion of mine was borne out by the fact that Chekhov did not leave an address where we could inform him of the reception the play was given. Even Olga Knipper did not know where he had gone. And it seemed–

But Chekhov had left a "deputy" in the person of a lovable colonel who was to see that there should be no mistakes made in the customs of military life, in the manner and method of the officers' bearing in the play, in the details of their uniforms, and so on. Anton Pavlovich paid a great deal of attention to this detail of his play because there had been rumours that he had written a play against the army, and these had aroused confusion, anxiety, and ill feeling on the part of military men. Chekhov least of all desired to hurt the self-esteem of the military men. In fact, he always had

Scene from the fourth act of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* (1901)

the best opinion about the armed forces, especially armymen, for, he said, they were bearers of a cultural mission, since they brought with them new demands on life, knowledge, art, happiness, and joy to the farthest corners of the provinces.

I should like to relate an anecdote which fully characterizes Chekhov. During the dress rehearsals we received a letter from him, and again there was no address. It stated, "Cross out the whole of Andrei's monologue and replace it with the words 'A wife is a wife'." In the original manuscript Andrei delivered a fine speech which defined wonderfully the pettiness of many Russian women: before marriage they keep alive in themselves a bit of poetry and femininity; once married, they wear dressing-gowns and slippers or rich but tasteless clothes. Their souls are clad in similar dressing-gowns and slippers. What can one say of such women and are they worthy of being spoken of? "A wife is a wife!" With the help of an actor's intonation this little line expressed the entire meaning of the monologue. This was one more example of Chekhov's sapient and profound laconism.

The first act was a big success at the *première.* It shows Irina's birthday party and there were many curtain calls (we had not yet abolished them then). But after the other acts and the final curtain the applause was so meagre that one curtain call was the most we could get. We thought the play had failed and it took a long time for Chekhov's play to captivate the spectator.

From the point of view of acting and directing, this play was one of the best we had staged. Olga Knipper, Maria Lilina, Margarita Savitskaya, Ivan Moskvin, Vasily Kachalov, Vladimir Gribunin, Alexander Vishnevsky, Leonid Gromov (later Leonidov), Alexander Artyom, Vasily Luzhsky and Maria Samarova may indeed be considered exemplary performers and creators of Chekhov's classical characters. I was successful in the part of Vershinin, though I did not think so myself because I did not feel the emotion that comes when the actor lives the rôle created by the playwright.

On his return, Chekhov said he was satisfied with our production, although he was sorry that in the fire scene we did not ring the bell or sound the military signals as we should have done. He continuously complained about that. We suggested that he should rehearse the fire sound effects himself, and put the whole stage apparatus at his disposal. Anton Pavlovich gladly availed himself of the opportunity to play and went enthusiastically about the job, drawing up a long list of sound-effect devices he needed. I did not want to disturb him, so I did not go to the rehearsal and did not know what happened.

During the performance, Chekhov came to my dressing-room after the fire scene and sat down quietly on a sofa in the corner. Surprised by his silence, I asked him what was the matter.

"Listen, it's wrong! They are swearing!" he said briefly.

Next to the director's box sat a group of people who sharply criticized the play, the actors and the theatre. At the outbreak of the cacophony of the fire sound effects, which they failed to understand, they burst into laughter, ridiculing the whole thing, not knowing that the author of the play and the director of the sound effects was sitting next to them.

When he finished his story, Chekhov broke into merry laughter, and then started coughing so much that I became afraid for him.

THE FIRST TRIP TO PETERSBURG

ACCORDING TO TRADITION, our Moscow season ended with a great ovation for all the actors of our company. Later, after we had built a revolving stage, we used it for the final ovation, with the entire troupe present on the stage, together with the scenery. The actors moved with the floor to the back of the stage, leaving the audience with the scenery turned inside out and with the words "Good Luck" inscribed on it.

It was with a great deal of fear, and only because of economic necessity, that we undertook our first trip to Petersburg in 1901. Our fear was due to the fact that there had always been a great deal of animosity between the two capitals. All that came from Moscow was a failure in Petersburg and vice versa. Our fears, however, were in vain: we were received very well. We became good friends with Petersburg and visited it annually after the Moscow season.

There was something special about our Petersburg trips. In Moscow we had a great many friends, but then they knew us and we knew them very well. We could see each other whenever we wanted to. But with our Petersburg friends we spent six weeks or two months at most, and not every year at that. We usually came in spring, when ice on the Neva was melting, when trees and bushes were breaking into leaf, when windows were being thrown open, and larks and canaries were beginning to sing again; when people were resuming their picnics to the islands and the sea-shore, when the sun was shining more brightly and the white nights made sleep all but impossible. Spring in Petersburg and the arrival of the Moscow Art Theatre troupe became synonyms. This made our meetings all the more pleasant and joyful and our partings all the sadder. We were fêted and petted more than we deserved.

After such a preface I can speak of our trips to Petersburg without any fear of being accused of boasting. But then, I think the following excerpt from a letter from one of our Petersburg friends, an old theatre-goer, will do so more eloquently than I can ever hope to do:

"Several years have passed since the Moscow Art Theatre last visited us. There have been so many momentous events since then that it seems that this was a long, long time ago. But, when we recall the past, we see how much your visits and performances meant for us–performances which everyone wanted to attend: the intellectuals, the students, the workers, the pupils of the Smolensk and other evening schools. You heard from the management about the thousands that queued up day and night before the theatre, in frost or March slush, to get a ticket; you saw the excited spectators who watched you breathlessly and applauded enthusiastically when the final curtain came down; you received flowers and wreaths and picked up little bouquets that were thrown from the gallery by students; and on your departure to Moscow you waved and said good-bye to numberless people who came to see you off, people you did not know but had established contact with, people who came from all parts of the city to see you once again and to wave their handkerchiefs as your train pulled out. I wonder if you realized that the feelings we expressed at our meetings and partings and our ovations were different from those with which we greeted other favourites of ours. Being old theatregoers, we are well acquainted from our young days with the delight and excitement we experience when watching talented actors. We wept at the theatre and then shouted like children to give vent to the feelings surging in our hearts. And, meeting great artistes, we anticipated this excitement and intoxicating delight. But with you it has always been different: we waited for you and greeted you as we waited for and greeted spring which brings joy, dreams and hopes, which even heals broken hearts. We saw your best productions time and again and not only saw them, but *listened* to them as we listen to music and, listening to them, we were happy. We experienced artistic pleasure and moments of ecstasy before, but it was only thanks to you that we realized that stage art can be something dear and wonderful, as wonderful as spring, that it can bring happiness to people of all ages.... Have you ever felt all that? Have you ever sensed the aroma of the moods which you aroused in us?"

We were fêted by all sorts of people. The most memorable occasion was the dinner during our first visit at the Contin Restaurant. The best orators of the time–A. F. Koni, S. A. Andreyevsky and N. P. Karabchevsky–greeted us with speeches that were interesting in content and talented in form. Koni assumed the role of a stern public prosecutor. In a dry, official tone, turning to Nemirovich-Danchenko and myself, he said:

"The accused will rise."

We rose from our chairs.

"Gentlemen of the jury, you have before you two miscreants who have committed a serious crime. With deliberate malice they have killed the well-known, well-beloved, respected, honoured, and ancient–(after a comic pause) –*routine.* (Again the serious tone of the prosecutor.) The murderers have mercilessly divested it of its magnificent cloak; they have made a hole in the fourth wall and shown the intimate life of men to the crowd; they have destroyed theatrical lies and replaced them with truth, which, as it is well known to everybody, is like poison to some."

In his peroration he turned to those present, and begged them to show no mercy in pronouncing their verdict, to wit: "Sentence the two of them to life *imprisonment–in* our hearts."

Another of the orators, Andreyevsky, unexpectedly announced that:

"A theatre has come to visit us, but to our complete amazement, there is not a single actor or actress in it."

It seemed that he was beginning to criticize us and we pricked up our ears.

"I do not see a single shaven face," he continued, "nor any curled hair burned by daily application of the hairdresser's irons; I hear no sonorous voices; I do not see any faces lighting up with anticipation of praise; I see no actor-like manner of walking, no theatrical gestures, no false pathos, no waving of hands, no strained temperaments. What kind of actors are they? And where are their actresses? I do not hear their rustling skirts, their backstage gossip and intrigues. Where are their painted faces, their drawn eyebrows, their beaded eyelashes? In this theatre there are no actors and no actresses, but men and women who deeply believe in their art . . ." the rest was compliments.

And here is another scene from our Petersburg life. Some young people have invited us to their little flat. It is so packed with people that many have to wait outside, on the cold stairs, for a chance to be introduced to the "Muscovites," to chat with them about art, Chekhov, Ibsen or Maeterlinck, about the ideas that came to their heads as they watched some play of ours, or to ask us to explain why we acted a play or a rôle in this way and not in that. We sit around a table loaded with food and beer that our young hosts bought with their last money, while they stand about us and ask us to eat and drink. We talk and philosophize. Vasily Kachalov recites, Ivan Moskvin jokes, Alexander Vishnevsky laughs louder than anyone else. One orator has not yet completed his fiery speech, another is already climbing on to a chair to begin his. Then we all sing.

On our visits to Petersburg we arranged *soirées* at which we presented acts from Chekhov's plays without any scenery, make-up or costumes. We liked such performances for they permitted us to present the outer action of a play with the aid of restrained movements and hints only and to focus the spectators' attention on the emotions of the characters as conveyed by mimetics, looks and intonation of the voice. The public, it seems, liked such performances too.

The last performance in Petersburg usually meant the last production of the winter season and the beginning of the summer vacation. That evening, or rather that night, after the show, we usually organized an outing to the islands. For us it was a wonderful spring holiday.

I wonder whether non-actors can understand the meaning of the words "the end of the season" and how much the holiday on this memorable day meant for us? The end of the season, even for a devotee of theatrical art, means the beginning of freedom, though it does not last long–just through the summer; it means the end of stringent obligations, of army-like discipline; it means the right to fall ill, for during the season we are often forced to perform even when we have fever; it means the right to breathe fresh air and see the sun and daylight, for during the winter season an actor has no time for walks and sees daylight only when he has to go to the theatre for a rehearsal–the rest of the day is spent on the stage, dimly lit by a few lamps during the rehearsal or flooded with electric light for the performance. During the season we go to bed when people get up to go to work and wake up when the streets are full of people.

The end of the season means the right to do whatever our feelings, will and mind want to do after having been subordinated for almost a whole year to the will of the dramatist and the stage director, to the repertoire, to the theatre. This life of a willing slave lasts from August until June, and sometimes even longer. And for that reason the last day of the winter season and the first day of the two-month rest is a memorable, long-awaited moment in our lives.

On the last night of the season, when the fragrant Petersburg spring is in the air with its warm sea breeze, spring flowers, early greenery, nightingales, when the city sees its first white nights, our dear and hospitable Petersburg friends usually collected money for an outing on the Neva and the sea-shore. A river steamer was usually hired for the night and we would greet sunrise on the sea-shore. There we would fish or buy fish and prepare a wonderful soup. We would go boating, roam about the islands, go into the woods, chance upon friends, caught there when the Neva bridges were raised.

On one such night we met the old and famous operetta singer, Alexander Davydov, who was known as the greatest interpreter of gypsy songs in Russia. When he was at his best, one could not hear him without weeping, there was so much soul and temperament in his singing. It was not for nothing that the famous tenor Angelo Masini loved to hear him. But Davydov had become old, he was decrepit, he had no voice left. Yet his glory still lived. The young people among us who had never heard the old man on the stage, but had heard so much about him, begged him to sing some of his best gypsy songs for them that they might be able to tell their children that they too had heard the famous Davydov. We wakened the owner of a café, made him open it and prepare us some tea, and here the famous old man, with the hoarseness of age in his voice, sang, or rather declaimed musically several love songs that made us weep. He showed his great art even in the semi-musical sphere of the gypsy song. Besides this, he forced us to think of that secret of sound and word in musical declamation which was known to him, but not to us, who were the servants of the word. This was the last time I saw him, for soon afterwards he died.

PERFORMING IN THE PROVINCES

SOMETIMES our theatrical season did not end in Petersburg, but would be continued in Kiev, Odessa, or Warsaw.[44] These journeys to the South, the sea, the Dnieper or the Vistula were very much to our liking. We had many friends there who wanted to see in us, in our repertoire and in the art of their beloved poets a hope for a brighter future, freedom and better life. The same thing that happened in Petersburg was repeated again. Letters from old and young theatre-lovers, crowds of people, ceremonious meetings and farewells, the rain of flowers and all the other attributes of success were ours. They also arranged a *folle journée** for us, that is, they hired a large steamer, the lower cabins of which hid a military band, a Rumanian orchestra, a chorus, soloists. These hidden delights appeared unexpectedly to the joy of everybody on the deck during the journey and added their spice to the happiness of the occasion. We would dance on the deck under the blazing sun, or the steamer would stop near a large meadow on the shore of the Dnieper and we would start all sorts of athletic contests and games, and processions with music.

In the provinces the end of the season would be celebrated with a dinner which lasted long past midnight. Once this gathering was held after the performance in the Kiev public garden, on the bank of the Dnieper. After the dinner the whole company went for a walk along the river and entered the old palace park. We were in a Turgenev-like atmosphere, with ancient alleys and little groves. One place reminded us of the scenery in the second act of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country.* Here there were also benches for spectators. Our friends sat down and we began our impromptu performance in natural environments. When my turn came, Olga Knipper and I, as we are supposed to do in the play, walked along a long alley-way, repeating our text, and then sat down on a bench, according to our usual *mise-en-scène,* and–stopped, because we could not continue. All that I had done seemed false in these natural surroundings. And it had been said of us that we had developed simplicity to a point of naturalism! How conventional things looked –things that we had become used to do on the stage!

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* Literally–a mad day. (Fr.)

In Odessa our farewells almost ended in a catastrophe. This was on the eve of the revolution and the atmosphere was tense. The police were on the alert. When we left the theatre in which we had been playing we found ourselves surrounded by a big and noisy crowd. They carried us with them along the streets, along the wonderful sea boulevard. At the end of the boulevard a police patrol awaited the crowd. As we approached it, the atmosphere about us became even more strained than before.

It looked as if the police were about to disperse the crowd with their whips. But this time no force was used: the crowd started dispersing of its own accord. When I came to my room, I could hear cries in the distance. Apparently something was going on outside, but in the darkness one could not say what it was.

MOROZOV AND THE NEW THEATRE

NOTWITHSTANDING our artistic success, the financial position of the theatre was far from satisfactory. There was a deficit that grew with each month. Our reserve fund had been exhausted and it was necessary to call a meeting of our shareholders and ask them to donate more money. It was a pity, but the majority of them found it impossible to do so for lack of means, despite their warm desire to help the theatre. The period was most critical. But fate was on our side and brought us a saviour.

One of our first performances of *Tsar Fyodor* was attended by Savva Timofeyevich Morozov. This remarkable man was fated to play the important and honourable rôle of a Maecenas who not only was able to bring material sacrifices to the altar of art, but who could also serve art faithfully, unselfishly and without any love of self, ambition or thought of personal gain.[45] Morozov saw the performance and decided that it was necessary to help our theatre. The chance to do this came very soon. Absolutely unexpectedly, Morozov appeared at the meeting and offered to buy up all the shares. The shareholders agreed, and from that time on, Morozov, Nemirovich-Danchenko and I remained the only owners of the theatre. Morozov financed it and undertook to supervise its business affairs. He entered into the smallest details and gave all of his free time to the theatre.

An artist at heart, he naturally wanted to take an active part in the artistic work of the theatre too. He undertook the supervision of the electric lighting of the stage and the auditorium. He lived most of the summer in Moscow, while his family rested in the country. Morozov spent all his free time experimenting with lighting effects. He turned his house and garden into an experimental station. The parlour became a laboratory and the bath-room was turned into a chemical laboratory in which he prepared lacquers of various tones and colours for painting electric bulbs and glass, so that more artistic tones of stage lighting could be achieved. Trials of all sorts of electric effects which required space were made in his large garden. Morozov, dressed in working clothes, worked side by side with the electricians and locksmiths, astounding specialists with his knowledge of electricity. With the beginning of the season Morozov entered on his duties as lighting engineer in the theatre and placed his department on a very high footing–quite a feat, considering poor wiring and inadequate machinery in the rented Hermitage in Karetny Ryad.

Notwithstanding his multitudinous business interests, Morozov came to the theatre for almost every performance, and when he could not do so, he kept in touch with the theatre by telephone in order to be fully aware of what was afoot not only in the lighting department, but in every branch of the complex theatrical mechanism.

Morozov was touching in his enthusiasm, in his unselfish devotion to art, in his overwhelming desire to help the theatre in every possible way. One day, I remember, the scenery for Nemirovich-Danchenko's play *In Dreams* just could not be arranged properly. There was no time to remake the scenery and we were forced to cover its faults as much as we could, and all of us began to search for things that could be used, among the props. Even the directors and their assistants were engaged in the work, and with them Savva Timofeyevich. We watched with admiration while this distinguished-looking, middle-aged man climbed ladders to hang draperies and pictures or carried furniture, and carpets. He worked enthusiastically and my liking for him became deeper and more tender.

Nemirovich-Danchenko and I decided to acquaint him more closely with the purely artistic side of the theatre. And this was done not because he controlled the financial nerve of the theatre, but because he evinced much taste and understanding in dramaturgy and acting. The repertoire, distribution of rôles, shortcomings and production were discussed together with Morozov, who proved himself a useful worker in this field also.

But it was at the time when the question of hiring a new building for the theatre could no longer be avoided or delayed, that Morozov really revealed his selfless devotion and love for art. He undertook to settle this question himself, and he settled it in a broad and generous way. He built us a new theatre with his own money in Kamergersky Street. All for art and the actor—that was the motto that guided his actions. That would benefit the audiences too. In this manner he did exactly the opposite of what is usually done when a theatre is built. Usually three-quarters of the money is expended on the foyer and the various rooms used by the audience, and only one-quarter on settings and the actors. Morozov spared no expenses for the stage and its paraphernalia, for the actors' dressing-rooms, but as far as the auditorium and the foyer were concerned, he finished them with extraordinary simplicity. The plans were drawn up by the famous architect, F. O. Shekhtel, who did everything free of charge. There were no bright spots or gilding. This was done so as not to divert the attention of those sitting in the auditorium and to save all the colour spots and effects for the stage.

The theatre was completed within a few months. Morozov, in order to be always present to supervise the work, refused a well-earned rest in summer and moved to the construction site—into a small room near the builders' office, in the midst of noise, dust, and cares.

He showed special love for the stage and its lighting. According to the plans that we had worked out in common, he built a revolving stage which at that time was rare, even abroad. This stage was much better perfected than the usual type of revolving stage, in which only the floor revolves. Morozov and Shekhtel built a stage with a complete revolving substage beneath it. A tremendous trap was made in the stage which could be sunk with the aid of electricity in order to serve as a river or a mountain chasm. The same trap could be lifted, so as to make a terrace or a mountain platform. The lighting system was the best obtainable at that time. It was operated by means of an electrical keyboard which controlled the entire lighting of both stage and auditorium. There were many other perfections which are outside the province of this book.

The new theatre considerably strengthened our position.

When, with Morozov's assistance, our theatre became a profitable institution, we decided to strengthen its position still more by handing it over, together with all the properties and repertoire, to the group of actors who were really the founders of the company, its heart and soul. Morozov refused to be repaid for the expenses he had incurred in staging productions and supporting the theatre, and turned over everything to this group, which has since been the collective owner of the theatre.

THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL LINE

The Enemy of the People

OUR REMOVAL to the new theatre in Kamergersky Street in September 1902 coincided with the emergence of a new line in our repertoire and in the trend of the theatre. I shall call it the *social-political line.*

This trend in the repertoire and actors' work actually appeared two years earlier, but it appeared accidentally, when we staged Ibsen's *The Enemy of the People (Dr. Stockman)* during the 1900-1901 season.

In my repertoire, Dr. Stockman is one of those few happy rôles that captivate by their inner strength and charm. I understood and liked the play the very first time I read it, and saw how I should play the rôle at the very first rehearsal. Life itself had obviously taken care to do all the preparatory creative work and stock up the necessary spiritual material and reminiscences of events similar to the ones in the play. In my work on the play and the rôle, as stage director and actor, I proceeded along the line of *intuition* and *feeling,* but the play and the rôle proved to have another, broader meaning–social-political significance and tone.

I personally was carried away by Stockman's love of and irresistible craving for *truth*. In this rôle I found it easy to put on a pair of rose-coloured glasses to trust naively in people, to believe and sincerely love them. I found it quite easy to imagine how surprised Stockman looked when he saw the rotten souls of the men who pretended to be his friends. In the moment of his enlightenment I became afraid, but I don't remember whether it was for him or for myself. I clearly understood that with each act Stockman became more and more lonely, and when, at the end of the play, he at last stood alone, the final sentence "He who stands alone is the strongest" seemed to beg for utterance.

Stanislavsky as Dr. Stockman in Ibsen's *The Enemy of the People* (1900). A bronze statuette by S. Sudbinin

From intuition I passed instinctively to the inner image with all its peculiarities and details: short-sightedness which spoke so eloquently of his inner blindness to human faults, the childlike and youthful manner of movement, the friendly relations with his children and family, the happiness, the love of joking and playing, the gregariousness and attractiveness which forced all who came in touch with him to become purer and better, and to show the best sides of their natures in his presence. From intuition I went to the outer image too, for it flowed naturally from the inner image, and the soul and body of Stockman-Stanislavsky became one organically. I only had to think of Stockman's thoughts and cares and the signs of short-sightedness would come of themselves, together with the forward stoop of the body, the quick step, the eyes that looked trustfully into the soul of the man or object on the stage with Stockman, the index and the middle fingers of the hand stretched forward of themselves for the sake of greater conviction, as if to push my own thoughts, feelings and words into the soul of my listener. All these habits came of themselves, unconsciously, and quite apart from myself. From where did they come?

I guessed from where quite accidentally a few years after I first played Stockman. In Berlin, I met a scientist I had often seen before in a Vienna sanatorium, and I saw that Stockman's fingers were very much like his. It is very possible that I had "borrowed" them from him. Meeting a famous Russian musician and critic I recognized in him my manner of stamping in one place when playing Stockman.

I only had to assume Stockman's manners and habits, even off the stage, and in my soul there were born the feelings and perceptions that had given them birth. They became my own organically, or, to be exact, my own passions became Stockman's. And during this process I felt the greatest joy an actor can feel, the right to speak on the stage the thoughts of another, to surrender myself to the passions of another, to perform another's actions, as if they were my own.

"You are mistaken, you are animals, yes, animals," I shouted at the crowd at the public lecture in the fourth act of the play, and I shouted this sincerely, for I was able to assume the view-point of Stockman himself. And I found it pleasant to say this and to feel that the spectator, who had begun to love Stockman, was excited, and angry at me for the tactlessness of arousing my enemies with too much sincerity. Unnecessary straightforwardness and frankness destroy the hero of the play.

The actor and the stage director in me understood well indeed the scenic effect of such frankness, destructive for the character, and the charm of his truthfulness.

The image of Dr. Stockman became popular in Moscow and especially so in Petersburg. There were reasons for that too. In those days of political unrest–before the first revolution–the feeling of protest was very strong in society. People yearned for a hero who could tell the truth boldly to the government. There was a demand for a revolutionary play and *The Enemy of the People* was turned into one. It became a favourite, notwithstanding the fact that the hero despised unity and praised individuals to whom he would entrust the conduct of life. But Stockman protested, Stockman boldly told the truth, and that was considered enough to make him a political hero.

We staged *The Enemy of the People* in Petersburg on the day of the well-known massacre in Kazanskaya Square. The average run of spectators that night was from the intelligentsia—there were many professors and scientists. I remember that the orchestra was filled almost entirely with gray-headed people. Because of the sad events of the day, the auditorium was very excited and reacted to the slightest hints about freedom, to every word of Stockman's protest. Thunderous applause would break out at the most unexpected places. The performance assumed a political character. The atmosphere in the theatre was such that we expected arrests at any moment and a stop to the performance. The censors, who attended all the performances of the play and saw to it that I should use only the censored text and raised trouble over every word that was not there, redoubled their vigilance that night. I had to be extremely careful. When the text is cut and recut, it is easy to make a mistake and say too much. In the last act, Dr. Stockman restores order in his room after the raid by the crowd and finds the black coat he wore at a meeting on the day before. Seeing a rent in the cloth, he says to his wife:

"One must never put on a new suit when one goes to fight for freedom and truth."

The spectators connected this sentence with the massacre in Kazanskaya Square, where more than one new coat must have been torn in the name of freedom and truth. My words unexpectedly aroused such a pandemonium that it became necessary to stop the performance. Some rose from their seats and rushed to the footlights, stretching their hands towards me. That day I found from my own experience what power the theatre could exercise on the crowd.[46]

Plays and performances that can rouse public opinion and evoke such ecstasy acquire social-political significance and have the right to be ranked among our productions of this line.

It is possible that the selection of the play and the manner of acting were prompted by the mood then prevailing in society which yearned for a hero who would fearlessly tell the truth that had been forbidden by the authorities and censors. But we, the performers, did not think of politics. On the contrary, the manifestations engendered by the play came as a complete surprise. For us, Stockman was not a politician, not an orator at meetings, but simply a man of ideals, an honest and truthful person, a friend of his country and people–as every real and honest citizen should be.

And so, while for the spectators *The Enemy of the People* was a *social-political* play, for me it was one that belonged to the line of *intuition and feelings.* Through them I grasped the spirit and passion of the rôle and the characteristic features of the life depicted by the play; the "trend" of the play revealed itself to me by its own power. As a result, I found myself on the *social-political* line–from *intuition* via *reality and symbol* to *politics.*

Perhaps in our art there exists only one correct path–the line of intuition and feelings! And out of it grow unconsciously the outer and inner images, their form, the idea and the technique of the rôle. Perhaps, the line of intuition absorbs all the other lines, and grasps all the spiritual and physical contents of the rôle and the play. I had experienced the same sensation before, when I created the rôle of the uncle in *The Village Stepanchikovo.* There too, the more sincerely I believed his impossible naïveté and goodness of heart, the more tactless his actions became, the more the spectator was excited. The more misunderstandings there were, the more the spectators loved the hero for his childlike trustfulness and spiritual purity. There too the line of intuition and feelings absorbed all the other lines of the rôle, and the goal of the author and the tendency of the play were revealed not by the actor but by the spectator, as the result of all that he saw and heard in the theatre. And then as now, when I played Stockman, I felt good.

In performing in social-political plays, the actor should not think of social and political problems. He should be absolutely sincere and honest in his rôle. Therein lies the secret, I think, of the power the play exercises on the audiences.

MAXIM GORKY

The Petty Bourgeois

THE GENERAL UNREST and the brewing revolution brought to our theatre a series of plays that mirrored the social and political sentiments, discontent, protest, and dreams of a hero who would boldly speak the truth.

The censors and the police administration were on the alert, the blue pencil made endless journeys across the text of the plays, crossing out the slightest hints that might lead to unrest. It was feared that the theatres would be turned into an arena for propaganda. And to tell the truth, there were attempts made in that direction.

Tendency and art are incompatible; they exclude each other. True art fades whenever it is approached with tendentious, utilitarian, inartistic ideas. In art tendency must change into one's own ideas, turn into emotion, become a sincere effort and the second nature of the actor. Only then can it become part and parcel of the actor's spiritual life, the rôle, and the play. But then it is no longer a tendency, it is a personal credo. The spectator can make his own conclusions, and create his own tendency from what he sees in the theatre.

This is a necessary condition, and it is only when such a condition exists that one can think of producing plays of a social-political character. Did we have such creative conditions?

It was Maxim Gorky who initiated the social-political line in our theatre. We knew he was writing two plays. He had told me of one in the Crimea–it had no name then. The other was called *The Petty Bourgeois.* We were interested in the first, for in that Gorky had chosen the life of the people he loved, those "creatures that once were men" who created his fame as a writer. The life of tramps had never been presented on the Russian stage. Yet, like everything else that came from the lower strata of society they were attracting public attention. At that time we were seeking for talent among them. Most of the pupils of our theatrical school came from the people. Gorky, who also came from the people, was absolutely necessary for our theatre.

Maxim Gorky with the cast of *The Petty Bourgeois* (1902)

We insisted that Gorky finish his first play as quickly as possible so that we might open the theatre Morozov was building for us with its production But Gorky complained about the characters of his play

"You see, the trouble is that all these people of mine have surrounded me, and are crowding me and themselves, and I can't get them to take their proper places or reconcile them with each other. The devil take them! They talk, talk and talk, and they talk so well that, honestly, it would be a pity to stop them "

The Petty Bourgeois was ready for production before the first play. Of course, we were glad to get it, and decided to open our new theatre with its production. The trouble was that we had no actor who could play the part of Teterev, a contrabasso from the church choir of a provincial town, who was the hero of the play. The rôle demanded a bright personality and a thundering voice. Among the pupils of our school there was one who undoubtedly fitted the part. He had the necessary voice, he had sung in a church choir, and later in a chorus of one of the suburban restaurants. Baranov—that was his name—was undoubtedly talented, very kind-hearted, but at the same time a drunkard and completely uncultured. It would have been hard to explain to him the literary subtleties of Gorky's play. But in the rôle of Teterev, as we saw later, his crudeness came in very handy. He took all that Teterev says and does in the play for gospel truth. Teterev became for him a real person, a hero and ideal, and thanks to this, the tendencies and thoughts of the author recreated themselves in the soul of the actor. No technique or skill could have achieved such seriousness and sincerity in one's relation to the situations in the play and the thoughts of the character. Baranov's Teterev was not theatrical, he was a real choir singer, and the spectator felt this at once and appreciated it at its true worth. The rest was in the hands of the stage director, who had ample means at his disposal to put the character in its place and endow it with genuine significance.

The 1901-1902 season, during which *The Petty Bourgeois* was in rehearsal, was coming to its close, but the play was not yet ready for the dress rehearsal with which we usually fixed the play in our minds. If it were not fixed in time, everything would be forgotten and we would have to begin the work all over again. Therefore, notwithstanding all obstacles, we decided to hold a public dress rehearsal in Petersburg, where we usually performed in spring. The time was one of political unrest, and the police and censors watched every step we made, for the Art Theatre, thanks to its new repertoire, was considered progressive, while Gorky himself was under police surveillance. There was no end of trouble!

Count Witte did more than any one to secure permission for the production. Permission was at last received, but many changes were made by the censors in the text of the play. Some of them were quite funny. For instance, the words "the wife of the merchant Romanov" were supplanted by the words "the wife of the merchant Ivanov" for the name Romanov smelled of a hint at the reigning house. At first we obtained permission to stage the play only for season-ticket holders, for in his negotiations with the authorities Nemirovich-Danchenko pointed out that by banning the play they were depriving us of the possibility of fulfilling our obligations to the season-ticket holders. This led to a curious episode that many seem

Maria Lilina (1900)

highly improbable, but that was nevertheless extremely characteristic of the times

Fearing that apart from the more or less "reliable" season-ticket holders there might be many ticketless young people at the show—and, incidentally, we always let them in, the governor of Petersburg ordered all the ushers replaced by policemen. When Nemirovich-Danchenko learned of this, he again replaced the policemen, who had a disturbing effect on the public, by ushers. He was asked for an explanation of his action by the assistant chief of police, then by the chief of police and finally by the governor. Vladimir Ivanovich refused to leave the theatre during the performance to go to the gover-

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1901)

not and saw him only on the following morning. He told the governor that policemen in uniform had a disturbing effect on the public, and the governor then ordered the policemen to dress in livery. All of official Petersburg–grand dukes and the ministers, the entire censorship committee, representatives of the police and other governmental departments, their wives and families–were present in the Panayev Theatre where the dress rehearsal was staged. The vicinity of the theatre and the theatre itself were guarded by special police units, and mounted gendarmes were stationed in the square in front of the theatre. It looked as if these preparations were for a general battle and not for dress rehearsal.

The *première* was moderately successful. Baranov was more successful than the play. He was a product of the soil, a second Chaliapin.

Society ladies wanted to make his acquaintance. He was led into the auditorium. He was surrounded by princesses. He flirted with them. The scene was almost indescribable.

On the next day the papers praised him to the skies. This praise was his destruction. The first thing he did after reading the reviews was to buy a top hat, gloves and a fashionable coat. Then he began to curse Russian culture.

"All we have is ten or fifteen newspapers. In Paris or London," he said, "there are five hundred, or even five thousand."

In other words, Baranov was sorry that only fifteen newspapers had praised him, and that were he in Paris, there would have been five thousand reviews. This, from his point of view, was the real meaning of culture.

Baranov's tone changed. Soon he began to drink. He was cured and pardoned, because he was talented. He began to live an exemplary life. But as he went on playing Teterev and his success grew, he became more and more spoiled. He was guilty of inaccuracies, he took advantage of his illnesses, and once he did not turn up at the theatre altogether. We were forced to part with him. He walked the streets of Moscow, reciting verses and monologues in a thunderous voice and roaring in mighty vocal crescendos. He was often taken to police stations. Now and then he came to see us. We always received him hospitably and dined and wined him, but he never asked us to take him back.

"I know I am not worthy of it," he would say.

Later on someone met him dressed in underclothes, and at last he disappeared. Where is he now, the dear, talented tramp with his childlike heart and brain? Most probably he has died—from too much glory, too much success. May he rest in peace!

The play, on the whole, was not successful, either in Petersburg or in Moscow, and despite all our efforts the spectators failed to grasp its social-political significance, unless it be Baranov's rôle and he did not think of politics at all.

"THE LOWER DEPTHS"

ONE EVENING, during our first trip to the Crimea, Gorky and I were sitting on a verandah, listening to the rolling waves, when he told me the story of a play he was dreaming of writing. In the first draft, the leading part was that of a lackey from a well-to-do house who was fonder of the collar of his dress shirt than of anything else in the world because it was the only reminder of his former life. The doss-house was packed, its inmates were always cursing each other, the atmosphere was poisoned with hate. The second set ended in an unexpected police raid. At the news that the police were about to swoop on the doss-house the whole ant-hill came to life, trying to hide stolen goods. The third act showed spring, the sun. Nature bloomed again, the inmates of the ill-smelling doss-house came out into the open air to work on a farm; they sang songs and forgot their old hate of each other.

We received the play from Gorky, which he called *The Lower Depths of Life,* but later changed to *The Lower Depths* on the advice of Nemirovich-Danchenko. Once again we faced a difficult problem–a new tone and manner of playing, and a new and peculiar romanticism and pathos that bordered both on theatricality, on the one hand, and on sermon, on the other.

"I can't bear to see Gorky come out on the pulpit like a clergyman and read his sermon to his congregation as he would in a church," Chekhov once said about Gorky. "Gorky is a destroyer, who must destroy all that deserves destruction. Therein lies his strength and his calling."

One must know how to pronounce Gorky's words so that the phrases live and resound. His instructive and propagandist speeches, those like the one about Man, must be pronounced simply, with sincere enthusiasm, without any false and highfalutin theatricality. If they are not, his serious plays become mere melodramas. We had to have our own peculiar style of the tramp, and not to confuse it with the accepted type of theatrical vulgarity. The tramp must have a breadth, freedom and nobility all his own. Where were we to get them? It was necessary to enter into the spiritual springs of Gorky himself, just as we had done in the case of Chekhov, and find the current of the action in the soul of the writer. Then the colourful words of the tramp's

Stanislavsky, Lilina and Gorky (1900)

aphorisms and flowery phrases of the sermon would imbibe of the spiritual content of the poet himself, and the actor would share his excitement.

As usual, Nemirovich-Danchenko and I approached the new play each in our individual manner. Vladimir Ivanovich gave a masterly analysis of the play. Being a writer, he knows all the approaches of literature which serve him as short cuts to creativeness. I, as usual at the beginning of all work, was in a helpless muddle, rushing from local colour to feeling, from feeling to the image, from the image to the production. I bothered Gorky, looking for creative material. He told me how he wrote the play, where he found his types, how he wandered in his youth, how he met the originals of his characters and particularly Satin, the rôle I was to play. The tramp who served him as the original for Satin suffered for his selfless love for his sister, who was married to a post-office official. The latter proved an embezzler and faced a hard-labour term in Siberia. Satin got the necessary money and saved his sister's husband, who, believing Satin got it unlawfully, betrayed him. When Satin learned that, he went mad, hit the traitor on the head with a bottle, killed him, and was sentenced to exile. His sister died. When Satin returned from exile, he became a beggar roaming about Nizhny-Novgorod with his chest bared and begging in French. The ladies gladly gave him money because he looked picturesque and romantic.

Gorky's stories excited us and we decided to see for ourselves how these "creatures that once were men" lived. We arranged an excursion, in which many of the actors in the play, Nemirovich-Danchenko, Simov and I took part. Under the leadership of the writer Gilyarovsky, who studied the life of tramps, we went one night to the Khitrov Market. The tramps' religion was freedom, their sphere–danger, burglary, adventure, theft, murder. All this created around them an atmosphere of romanticism and peculiar savage beauty which we were seeking at that time.

We were out of luck that night. It was hard to get permission from the secret organizations of the Khitrov Market. A large theft had taken place that night and the entire Market was in a state of emergency. Everywhere we came across armed patrols. They stopped us continuously, demanding to see our passes. In one place we had to steal by unseen lest the patrols should stop us. After we had passed the first line of defence our progress became easier. We walked freely about the dormitories with numberless board cots on which lay tired men and women who resembled corpses more than anything else. In the very centre of the underground labyrinth was the local university and the intelligentsia of the Market. They were people who could read and write, and who at that time were occupied in copying parts for actors. These copyists lived in a small room. They proved themselves kind and hospitable, especially one of them, a well-educated man with fine hands and a delicate profile. He spoke many languages, and was an ex-officer of the guard, who had squandered all his property and sunk low. He got out of the hole, married, secured a good position, and wore a well-fitting uniform.

"Wouldn't it be nice to show myself in this uniform in the Khitrov Market?" he wondered one fine day.

He soon forgot the idea. But it returned again and again. Once, when he was sent to Moscow on business, he appeared in the Khitrov Market, astounded all of its inhabitants–and remained there for the rest of his life, without any hope of ever getting out.

These people received us like welcome guests, for they had known us for a long time, often doing work for us, copying our rôles. We brought along vodka and sausage, and a feast began. When we told them that we intended to produce a play by Gorky about people like them, they were deeply touched.

"This is indeed an honour!" cried one of them.

"What is there so interesting in us that they want to show us on the stage?" another wondered naïvely.

They talked about what they would do when they stopped drinking, became decent people and left this place....

One of them spoke about his past. His only reminder about it was a little picture cut out of some illustrated magazine in which an old man was showing a promissory note to his son, while the mother stood by weeping. The son, a handsome lad, stood ashamed, his head lowered. It was apparently a forgery. Simov did not like this picture. This was a signal for chaos to break out. The living vessels full of alcohol came to terrible life; they grabbed bottles and stools, and attacked Simov. Another moment, and he would have been killed, but Gilyarovsky thundered out a quintuple oath, astounding not only us by the complexity of its construction, but even the denizens of the depths. The copyists turned to stone from the unexpectedness of the curse and the enthusiasm and aesthetic satisfaction it brought them. Their mood changed at once. There was mad laughter, applause, ovations, gratefulness and congratulations for the inspired oath, which perhaps saved us from death or injury.

The excursion to the Khitrov Market, more than any discussion or analysis of the play, awoke my fantasy and inspiration. There was nature which one could mould to his desire; there was live material for the creation of images. Everything received a real basis and took its proper place. Making the sketches and the *mises-en-scène,* or showing the actors any of the scenes, I

As Satin in Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1902)

was guided by living memories, and not by invention or guess-work. But the chief result of the excursion was the fact that it revealed to me the inner meaning of the play.

"Freedom at any cost!" that was its meaning for me. That freedom for the sake of which men unknowingly descend into the depths of life and become slaves.

After our memorable excursion to the lower depths, I did not find it difficult to make sketches and *mises-en-scène*–I felt like an inmate of the doss-house. But I encountered difficulties as an actor: I had to interpret the prevailing social mood and the author's political trend, which was reflected in Satin's sermon and monologues. If one were to add the tramp romanticism that was pushing me into the usual theatricality, it will be easy to see what difficulties and dangers I had to contend with. Thus, playing Satin, I failed consciously to achieve what I had achieved unconsciously when portraying

Stockman. In Satin I played tendency itself and kept thinking of the play's social-political significance—and failed to interpret it. In the rôle of Stockman I did not think of either politics or tendency—they recreated themselves.

Experience led me to the conclusion that in social-political plays it is necessary to live the thoughts and feelings of the character one portrays, and then the tendency of the play will reveal itself by its own power. The straight path to the tendency inevitably leads to pure theatricality.

I had to work quite a bit on the rôle to get away from the wrong path I had embarked upon at the beginning when I thought too much of tendency and romanticism, which cannot be played and which have to create themselves as a result and consequence of a proper spiritual mood.

The production was tremendously successful. There were endless curtain calls for the actors—for Moskvin (Luka), Kachalov (Baron), Knipper (Nastya), Luzhsky, Vishnevsky and Burdzhalov, the stage directors, and for Gorky himself. It was very funny to see him appear for the first time on the stage, and stand there with a cigarette between his teeth, smiling and embarrassed, and not knowing that he was supposed to bow to the audience and to take the cigarette out of his mouth.

"By God, fellows, this is success, honest," Gorky seemed to be saying to himself. "They are clapping, and how! They are yelling! Just think of it!"

Gorky became the hero of the day. He was followed in the streets. Admirers, especially of the fair sex, crowded about him. At first he was disconcerted. He would approach them, pulling at his rusty, cropped moustaches, and running his strong fingers through his long hair or throwing his head back so as to clear his face and forehead of the mass of hair that fell over it—trembling, distending his nostrils, hunching his body in confusion.

"Listen," he would say to his admirers, smiling guiltily, "you know—somehow, it is most embarrassing—really—honest!—Why do you eye me like that? I am not a singer or a dancer. What a fix!—By God! Honest—"

But his funny embarrassment and peculiar, bashful manner of speech intrigued and attracted admirers more and more. Gorky's personal attraction was strong. He had his own beauty, freedom and ease. I remember his fine pose when he stood on the embankment in Yalta, waiting for my steamer to leave. Carelessly leaning against bales of goods and supporting his little son

19 02.

№ 148

МОСКОВСКІЙ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ ТЕАТРЪ

Среда, 18-го Декабря.

Въ 1-й разъ

НА ДНѢ,

сцены въ 4-хъ дѣйствіяхъ, соч. Максима Горькаго.

Участвующіе: Г. С. Бурджаловъ, Е. П. Муратова, М. Ф. Андреева, В. Ф. Грибунинъ, А. П. Харламовъ, А. Л. Загаровъ, М. Г. Савицкая, О. Л. Книпперъ, М. А. Самаровъ, В. В. Лужскій, К. С. Станиславскій, В. И. Качаловъ, М. А. Громовъ, И. М. Москвинъ, А. И. Адашевъ, Н. А. Барановъ, А. Л. Вишневскій и др.

Декораціи художника В. А. Симова.

НАЧАЛО ВЪ 8 ЧАС. ВЕЧ., ОКОНЧ. ВЪ 12 ЧАС. НОЧИ.

БИЛЕТЫ ВСѢ ПРОДАНЫ.

Четвергъ, 19-го Декабря, въ 2-й разъ НА ДНѢ.
(Билеты всѣ проданы).

Пятница, 20-го Декабря, [illegible]

Суббота, 21-го Декабря, въ 3-й разъ НА ДНѢ.

Репертуаръ спектаклей съ 22-го Декабря 1902 г. [illegible] Января 1903 г. [illegible]

Касса [illegible]

The poster announcing the Moscow Art Theatre *première* of Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1902)

Maxim, he looked thoughtfully into the distance, and it seemed that in another moment he would rise from the shore and fly into the boundless blue in the wake of his dreams.

THE LINE OF MANNERS

The Power of Darkness

I TRIED TO HAVE our new play follow the *line of intuition and feelings*, but, against my will, there was a twist and I found myself unexpectedly along the *line of manners.*

The Petty Bourgeois was to be followed by Lev Tolstoi's *The Power of Darkness.* Continuing to seek for the new we could not reconcile ourselves to a theatrical stencil of the Russian muzhik. We wanted to show the real muzhik, and not only the costume, but also his soul. But the result was not what we wanted. We could not give the spiritual side, we had not yet reached the stage where we could interpret that. In order to fill the void, as is always the custom in such cases, we exaggerated the outward and external side of manners. This remained unjustified inwardly and the result was naked naturalism. And the nearer it was to reality, the more ethnographical it was—the worse it was for us. There was no spiritual darkness, and therefore the outward and naturalistic darkness proved superfluous. It had nothing to round out and illustrate. Ethnography stifled the actor and the play itself.

But we were successful in creating more than was necessary in the sense of scenery and costumes, and I can say with certainty that the stage had never yet seen such a real village as we showed. We made an excursion for the purpose of studying village life in Tula Gubernia, the place where the action was supposed to have transpired. We lived there for two weeks and visited the near-by villages. Both Simov and Grigoryeva, who took care of the costumes in the theatre, were with us. We made plans of the huts, the courtyards and barns. We studied the customs, the marriage ceremonies, the run of everyday life, the necessary details of operating a farm. We brought back clothes, shirts, short overcoats, dishes, furniture. Not only that—we also brought back two living specimens of village life with us, an old man and an old woman. Both proved talented players, especially the old woman. They were to advise us on village customs. After several rehearsals they knew the text of all the rôles and could speak the lines without the help of the prompter. Once, when the actress who was playing Matryona fell ill, we asked the old woman to take her place at the rehearsal. She proved a tremendous sensation. It was she who showed for the first time on the stage the real Russian village, in all its spiritual darkness and power. When she gave Anisya the powder with which to poison her husband, when she put her crooked hand in her bosom, seeking there for the little package of poison, and then quietly, in a business-like manner, as if not understanding the depth of her villainy, explained to Anisya how to poison the man gradually and secretly, we felt shivers down our spine. Lev Tolstoi's son, Sergei Lvovich, was present at this rehearsal and he went into such ecstasy over the old woman's acting that he began to persuade us to give her Matryona's part. His proposal was tempting. The actress who played Matryona consented to surrender the rôle to the old woman. There was only one insurmountable difficulty. In the scenes where Matryona was supposed to swear at someone, the old woman would throw aside Tolstoi's text and use her own words which no censorship would ever allow on the stage. No matter how much we begged her to stop doing it, it was impossible to convince her that she could get along on the stage without vulgarity. In her opinion this was impossible for a true village type.

On the other hand, she interpreted the inner and outer contents of Tolstoi's tragedy so fully and truthfully, she justified each of our naturalistic details of production to such an extent that she became absolutely essential. Butova, who played Anisya, also was excellent as a peasant woman. The old woman and Butova were an unforgettable duo.

With a breaking heart I was forced to drop the old woman from the list of actresses, for she still continued to swear. I transferred her to the crowd which gathered in front of the house of Pyotr, Anisya's poisoned husband. I hid her in the back row, but her weeping covered all the other exclamations. Unable to part with her, I invented a special pause for her sake, during which she was to cross the stage, humming a song and calling someone in the distance. The sound of the old and weak voice was possessed of such breadth and conveyed the spirit of the Russian village with such veracity that it was impossible for any one of us to appear on the stage after her exit. We made a final try. We did not let her come out, but made her sing in the wings. But even this proved dangerous for the actors. Then we made a phonograph record of her song and used it as a background for action without breaking up the ensemble of the scene.

It was with pain that we denied ourselves her great but unapplied talents. But my experiment was not in vain. I proved to myself dozens of times at rehearsals that realism on the stage is naturalism only when it is not justified by the inner experience of the actor. Once it is justified, realism either becomes necessary or it simply passes unnoticed, thanks to the blending of inner and outer life. I would advise all theoreticians who do not know this from their own experience to test on the stage whether I am wrong or right.

Unfortunately, the outer realism of *The Power of Darkness* was not sufficiently justified from inside–by the actors, with the result that the play was dominated by things, properties, outer life. Having slipped from the line of intuition and feelings, we found ourselves on the line of manners and its details, which strangled the spiritual content of the play and rôles.

THE COSTUME DRAMA LINE INSTEAD OF INTUITION

Julius Caesar

THE SAME THING happened when we staged *Julius Caesar* as when we produced *The Power of Darkness.* Our acting proved inferior to the scenery and costumes, and instead of the line of intuition we found ourselves back with the costume drama line.

"It has been decided to produce Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," Nemirovich-Danchenko said entering my room and putting his hat on the table.

"When?"

"At the beginning of the coming season," he answered.

"But shall we have time to draw up the plan of production and prepare the scenery and the costumes? We are all going on our summer vacations in a day or two," I continued in amazement.

When Nemirovich-Danchenko talks as confidently as he did on that occasion, it means that he has sat up more than one night with a pencil in his hand developing the production plan and examining all the possible details of work in every sphere of the complex theatrical mechanism.

The selection of a play for our theatre's repertoire is very much like the experience of birth pangs. And that year this process was more difficult than ever. It was already April, time to go on our annual trip to Petersburg, and no one knew as yet what the repertoire for the next season was to be.

There was no time to argue; there was nothing to do but agree with Nemirovich-Danchenko and begin doing the impossible. Nemirovich-Danchenko and Simov went to Rome to gather material, and a regular office was established in the theatre to take care of the preparatory work. We set up a number of departments headed by responsible persons from among the actors and stage directors. These departments were housed in the foyer and the adjoining rooms. The first department took care of the literary side of the play–its text, changes and cuts, translation, comments and so on. The second department took care of all that treated of the locale, social conditions of life, customs, buildings, and usages of Caesar's time. The third department was responsible for the costumes, sketches, patterns, cloth, its buying and dyeing. The fourth department took care of weapons, armour and properties. The fifth department was in charge of the scenery, material for sketches, making of models; the sixth department of music, the seventh of placing the orders for everything that had been decided upon, the eighth of rehearsals, and the ninth of the crowd scenes and supernumeraries. The tenth department was administrative and distributed the materials we received among the other nine departments. A military discipline was proclaimed in the theatre, and all the actors, administrative workers and stage hands were mobilized. No one dared refuse to work on any pretext whatsoever.

Those of the mobilized who were not occupied in the theatre itself were sent to museums and libraries, to specialists in ancient culture, to private collectors, to antiquaries. The persons and institutions we approached responded to our requests, and sent us their priceless publications, rarities, armour, and so on. It may be said without exaggeration that all the rich material in Moscow was placed at our disposal.

Nemirovich-Danchenko brought still richer material from Rome.

Thanks to our organization, we were able to collect within a few weeks as much as it would have taken us more than a year to collect in ordinary circumstances. Much of which we cannot even dream at present could be got before the war. For instance, the members of the properties commission we sent to the stores brought a tremendous amount of cloth of various qualities and colours. The materials were hung on the stage. They were lighted up by the footlights, sidelights and toplights and spotlights, and examined from the auditorium. The more effective pieces of cloth were laid aside. The colour scale of the costumes was chosen with special attention and care, and no matter what groups of actors met on the stage, they always created a bouquet of harmoniously chosen colours.

We studied costumes, their patterns, and the methods of wearing them and carrying armour, and ancient plastics. We were forced to make not only a theoretical, but a practical acquaintance with all this. For this purpose we made rehearsal costumes, which we put on and wore for many days in the theatre. We used the same method earlier when we staged Chekhov's *Three Sisters.* We had to learn to wear uniforms. Then, as later, when we were preparing for *Julius Caesar,* we went around in uniforms the whole day and even dared to go out into the streets, where we were saluted by policemen and risked being arrested and tried as impostors. This experience taught us a great deal which one cannot learn in books, or from theories or drawings. We learned to handle a toga and its folds, to gather them in the fist, to throw the toga over the shoulder or head, to gesticulate, holding the tip of the toga. We thus created a system of movements and gestures that we borrowed from ancient statues.

On his return from abroad, Nemirovich-Danchenko took charge of the entire production, and the rest of us helped him. It was first necessary to design the scenery. Each set of scenery had to be original–not only in colour, but also in design, as worked out by stage director. This *je ne sais quoi* was to be found in the first place. Let me explain by an example. On a comparatively small stage with a comparatively small number of extras we were to show the large army of Brutus marching to the war. In the same scene there appears Brutus' enemy, Anthony, with his army. The action takes place in a great valley, which is convenient for a clash of two armies. With the help of a backdrop horizon and a painted perspective we were able to attain the desired impression of distance. But how were we to show a big army with the few supernumeraries we had? It was necessary to deceive the public. A trial showed that it was much better to show the passing warriors not fully, but only down to their waists, that is, their heads, helmets, the upper parts of their torsos and their spears. The illusion became greater when the soldiers passed behind trees or protruding cliffs. Taking advantage of the great trap on our stage, we showed only the upper parts of the torsos of the extras moving about in the trap. At the same time, other extras behind them carried a forest of spears, increasing the illusion of numbers in the crowd. This piece of hokum had still another profitable point: it gave us the possibility of costuming the extras only so far as their heads and torsos were concerned, for their legs were not seen. The extras passed along the trap, and circling the backdrop, appeared again before the public. The result was an endless procession of passing warriors. While the supernumeraries passed behind the backdrop, the tailors managed to put new details on their armour; that is, they changed helmets, donned other cloaks, and thus gave the illusion of a new detachment of soldiers, who were as yet unseen by the public.

The same small number of extras allowed us to create convincingly the effect of a street crowd in the first act. We made use of the great trap to create the impression of a street disappearing under a hill. In its depth the effect of a moving crowd was created in the same manner as the movement of the armies, and a whole cross-section of the life of ancient Rome was shown on the stage. Rows of shops stretched from the forestage into the trap and were lost in the crowd. There was an armourer's shop where swords, shields and armour were in the process of being forged, and in the proper places the ringing of the hammers in the shop drowned out the talk of the crowd. The street passed along the whole width of the stage and disappeared in the wings, while on the right an alley with a typical Italian stairway descended to it from the hills. In this way the citizens moved towards each other, up and down and along the stage, and that created a lifelike picture of Roman street life. At the corner of two streets was a barber's shop, where Roman patricians met and engaged in conversation, as we do in our clubs. Over the shop was a roof garden with a bench. From there the people's tribunes delivered their speeches, stopping the mob which crowded the forestage. Matrons passed along the stage, followed by slaves carrying their purchases. They were respectfully greeted by the dandies from the barber's shop, who, after the matrons passed, hastened to call in the passing courtesans. Up from below in the main street came a procession with Caesar, triumphantly recumbent on his litter, and Calpurnia, reclining on hers. When it reached the centre of the stage it was stopped by a soothsayer who confused everyone by his prediction. Behind them came Brutus, following the procession with a sorrowful gaze, and his supporters. He was surrounded by citizens who presented him with written petitions and complaints against ill-treatment. . . . I recall one rather anecdotal occurrence which shows eloquently the necessity of the strict training that must be given even to the most insignificant of extras. I was playing Brutus. One day, the extra who was to hand me a petition did not appear in the theatre on time. Nemirovich-Danchenko, who followed the performance from the wings, called over one of the free extras and asked him to hand me the necessary paper. With a walk typical of the manners of a clerk who approaches his superior, the messenger approached me, and making a completely modern bow, said very clearly:

"Konstantin Sergeyevich, Vladimir Ivanovich has asked me to give you this . . ." and presented me with a property Roman tablet.

Stage direction and the excellent acting of Vasily Kachalov in the title rôle made *Julius Caesar* a big hit. As far as the players were concerned, there was another disappointment—we just could not get the better of the production and again slipped from the line of intuition to the costume drama line.

The museum of the Art Theatre has the director's copy of the text of the play—the one prepared in every detail by Vladimir Ivanovich. The play was not staged so much as a Shakespearean tragedy as one depicting Rome in Caesar's time, and the director's copy is full of useful notes and remarks.

"THE CHERRY ORCHARD"

I WAS FORTUNATE to see how Chekhov created *The Cherry Orchard.* One day, Alexander Artyom was talking to him about fishing and describing how the worm should be hooked and how the line should be thrown. Artyom was a wonderful actor and he described everything so vividly that Chekhov said he was sorry there was no such scene in his play. Shortly afterwards, Anton Pavlovich saw another player of ours swimming in the river.

"Listen," he decided, "we must have Artyom fishing in my play and let X swim noisily near by, scaring the fish away and making Artyom mad."

Chekhov clearly saw the scene: Artyom fishing in the river and the other player swimming in it. A few days later he solemnly announced that his swimmer had an arm amputated, but that, though one-armed, he was a great lover of billiards. The angler in the play, he said, was an old valet who had saved up quite a tidy sum.

The old homestead took shape gradually: first the window with a tree growing so close that its branches forced their way into the house; then the branches bloomed and became snow-white; and finally came the owner—an old aristocratic lady.

"Only you haven't got an actress to play her," he would say. "We need an extraordinary one to play the old woman. She is the kind that is for ever borrowing money from the valet."

After that there appeared a man—the old woman's brother or maybe uncle, the one-armed gentleman who loved playing billiards. He was like a big child who could not live without the valet. One day the latter went out without preparing the gentleman's trousers, and he stayed all day in bed. . . .

We know now what has remained in the play and what has gone out, leaving little or no trace at all.

In the summer of 1902, when Chekhov was getting ready to write *The Cherry Orchard,* he and his wife, Olga Knipper-Chekhova, were staying at my mother's estate at Lyubimovka. Our neighbours had an English governess, a small, thin woman who wore braids and dressed like a man. It was very

Stanislavsky as Gayev in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1908)

difficult indeed to tell her sex or age. She treated Anton Pavlovich as an equal and he liked it very much. They met every day and talked nonsense. Chekhov, for instance, would tell her that in his youth he was a Turk and owned a harem, that he would soon return to his country, become a *pasha* and then write to her to come. As if in gratitude, the Englishwoman, who was an excellent gymnast, would jump on his shoulders and greet all the passers-by by taking off his, Chekhov's, hat and making him bow

Those who have seen *The Cherry Orchard* will probably recognize Charlotta's prototype in this original woman.

I recognized this the first time I read the play and congratulated Chekhov. He became extremely worried and told me that Charlotta should be a German woman, tall and thin–like our actress Muratova–and completely unlike the Englishwoman who served as his model.

The features of Yepikhodov came from several persons–the main from an attendant who lived on the premises and looked after Anton Pavlovich. Chekhov often spoke with him, told him to study, to educate himself. The man agreed with him . . . and the first thing he did was to buy himself a red tie and announce that he would learn French. But I do not know what path Chekhov took to arrive at the plump, elderly Yepikhodov–as he described him in the first draft of the play.

We had no actor to fit the part physically and at the same time we had to find a rôle for Ivan Moskvin, a thin young man, a talented actor and a favourite of Chekhov's. We gave him the part and he adapted it to his abilities and used it in his impromptu sketch at a *cabbage party*. We were afraid that Anton Pavlovich would get angry for taking liberties with his text, but he burst out laughing. After the rehearsal he approached Moskvin and said:

"You play Yepikhodov just as I had in mind. Listen, it's wonderful!"

Chekhov rewrote the part after seeing Moskvin rehearse.

The prototype of the student Trofimov was also one of the inhabitants of Lyubimovka.

In the autumn of 1903 Anton Pavlovich came to Moscow in very ill health. Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from attending almost all the rehearsals of his new play, the name of which he could not yet decide upon.

One evening he phoned and asked me to come and see him. I dropped everything and hastened over. I found him in very high spirits, notwithstanding his illness. Apparently he did not wish to speak of business, but to leave it to the very end, just like children leave sweets to the very end of the meal. We sat at the tea-table and laughed, because it was impossible not to laugh in Chekhov's presence. When tea was over, Anton Pavlovich invited me to his study, closed the door, sat down in his traditional corner of the sofa, made me sit in front of him, and began to persuade me for the umpteenth time that some of the actors did not fit their parts and should be replaced.

"Not that they are bad actors," he tried to mitigate his verdict, "they are wonderful."

I knew this was only a prelude to what he really wanted to say, and did not argue with him. At last we came down to business. Anton Pavlovich made a pause and tried to appear serious, but he could not help smiling–and triumphantly.

"Listen, I have found a wonderful name for the play. A wonderful name," he declared, staring at me.

"What is it?" I was excited.

*"Vìshneviy Sad,"** and he laughed happily.

I confess I did not see what there was to be happy about, for I found nothing unusual in the name. But I did not want to disappoint him and pretended that his discovery had made a deep impression on me. I wondered what it was that excited him in the new name of the play. But here I stumbled on one of Chekhov's peculiar traits. He never could explain what he had created. Instead, he started repeating in various ways and with various intonations:

"Vìshneviy Sad. Listen, it is a wonderful name. Vìshneviy Sad. Vìshneviy . . ."

His intonations made me understand that he was talking of something beautiful, of something he tenderly loved, and this charm in the name was reflected not in the name itself but in the way he pronounced it. I hinted carefully about this. My words saddened him, his triumphant smile vanished, and we both felt uncomfortable.

Several days, perhaps a week, passed after this meeting. One evening, he came smiling to my dressing-room during the performance and sat down at my table. He loved watching actors put on their make-up and costumes. He watched so attentively, we could guess from the expression of his face whether or not the make-up was successful.

"Listen, not Víshneviy, but Vishnyóviy Sad," he announced and burst out laughing.

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* *The Cherry Orchard.–Tr.*

At first I did not understand what he was talking about, but Chekhov lovingly repeated the word, stressing the tender sound of "yo" in the word as though he were trying to caress that former beautiful life which was no longer possible, which he himself was mournfully destroying in his play. This time I understood the delicate difference. Vishneviy Sad is a profitable commercial orchard. Such an orchard is necessary to life even at present. But Vishnyoviy Sad brings no profit. Its flowering whiteness speaks of the poeticalness of the former life of the aristocracy. The Vishnyoviy Sad grows for the sake of beauty, for the eyes of spoiled aesthetes. It is a pity to destroy it, but it is necessary to do so, for the country's economic development demands it.

All remarks and advice, which had to be dragged out of Anton Pavlovich, seemed to be rebuses and we had to unravel them because he would always hide himself to avoid stage directors and their questions. If anyone came to a rehearsal and saw Anton Pavlovich sitting modestly in a back row, he would never have believed that this was the author of the play. We tried in vain to make him sit down at the stage directors' table. And when we did succeed, he would begin to laugh. It was hard to see what made him laugh–whether it was that he was amused by playing a stage director and sitting at such an important table, or that he was thinking of fooling the stage directors and disappearing.

"I wrote it," he would answer our questions, "I am not a stage director, I am a doctor."

Comparing the manner in which Chekhov behaved himself at rehearsals with the way other authors held themselves, I cannot help but marvel at the extraordinary modesty of this great man and the boundless vanity of some lesser writers. One of them, for instance, when I suggested that a long-winded and false-sounding monologue in his play be cut short, answered bitterly:

"Go ahead and cut it, but don't forget that history will hold you responsible for that."

Yet when we dared suggest to Anton Pavlovich that a whole scene be thrown out at the end of the second act of *The Cherry Orchard*, he became sad and pale, but controlled himself and said:

"All right."

Never after did he say a single word to us about this incident.

I shall not describe *The Cherry Orchard* which we have staged so often in Moscow, Europe and America I shall only say a few things about its production

The production of *The Cherry Orchard* was accomplished with great hardships And little wonder, for it is very difficult As in a flower, its charm lies in its elusive, hidden fragrance To sense it, it is necessary to wait until the flower blossoms If you force the flower open, it dries up and dies

In those days our inner technique and ability of influencing the player's acting were very primitive We did not know the paths we should take to grasp the inner meaning of the play To help our actors, we used inspiring decorations and sound and lighting effects

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Gayev and Maria Lilina as Anya in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1908)

"Listen," Chekhov once said to somebody, but so that I would hear him, "I shall write a new play and the first words will be 'It's wonderful, this calm! No birds, no dogs, no cuckoos, no owls, no nightingales, no clocks, no sleigh bells, no crickets.' "

That stone was intended for my yard.

For the first time in his life Chekhov was in Moscow for a *première* of his play. We decided to take the opportunity to fête our favourite author, but he was against it and even threatened that he would not come to the theatre. We insisted, however, and he finally gave in. The *première* coincided with his patron saint's day.

The appointed date was close at hand and we had to think of the ceremony and a present for Anton Pavlovich. This was a hard question to settle. I visited all the antiquaries in Moscow, hoping to find something, but except for some very fine embroidered cloth I found nothing. As there was nothing better, we decorated the jubilee wreath with this cloth.

"At least," I thought, "we will present him with something of artistic value."

But Anton Pavlovich scolded me for this valuable gift.

"Listen, this is a wonderful thing, but it should be kept in a museum," he upbraided me after the jubilee.

"Tell me, Anton Pavlovich, what should we have given you?" I asked, confused.

"A mousetrap," he answered seriously after a moment's thought. "After all, mice must be destroyed," he laughed. "Korovin sent me a beautiful present, a beautiful one!"

"What was it?" I became interested.

"Fishing-rods."

None of the other presents he received pleased Chekhov, and some of them angered him by their banality.

"Listen, one shouldn't give a writer a silver pen and an antique ink-well."

"Well, what should one give?"

"A piece of rubber pipe. Listen, I am a doctor. Or socks. My wife doesn't look after me as she should. She is an actress. And I go around in torn socks. 'Listen, darling,' I say to her, 'the big toe of my right foot is coming out!' 'Wear the sock on your left foot,' she answers. I can't go on that way—"

And he rolled with happy laughter.

But at the jubilee he was far from happy. It looked as if he felt he would soon die. After the third act he stood deathly pale and thin on the right side of the stage and could not control his coughing while gifts were showered on him and speeches in his honour were being made. Our hearts grew small within us. Someone in the audience shouted that he should sit down. But he knit his brows and stood throughout the ceremony, at which he later laughed so good-humouredly in one of his works. Even on that evening he could not control his smile. One of his colleagues began his speech almost with the same words with which Gayev greeted the old cupboard in the first act of *The Cherry Orchard.*

"Dear and much respected (instead of saying cupboard, the speaker used Chekhov's name)—I greet you—"

Anton Pavlovich looked sideways at me (I had played Gayev) and smiled.

The jubilee was a triumphant occasion, but it smelled of a funeral. Our hearts were heavy.

The play itself enjoyed but a mediocre success and we blamed ourselves for not having conveyed much that was in the play.

Chekhov died without seeing the success of his last, beautiful play.

The play eventually enabled many of our players to show their prowess—Knipper (in the leading rôle of Ranevskaya), Moskvin (Yepikhodov), Kachalov (Trofimov), Leonidov (Lopakhin), Gribunin (Pishchik), Artyom (Firs) and Muratova (Charlotta). I was successful as Gayev and Chekhov himself praised me at a rehearsal for my acting in the fourth act.

The spring of 1904 was close at hand. Chekhov's health was becoming worse and worse. There appeared dangerous symptoms in the region of the stomach and there were hints of tuberculosis of the colon. A council of doctors decided to send Chekhov to Badenweiler. He began to prepare to go abroad. All of us tried to see him as often as it was possible. But his health often prevented him from seeing us. Though ill, he was very lively and very much interested in the Maeterlinck play, which we were then rehearsing. We had to keep him informed of the way things were going, and to show him the models of the scenery and explain the *mises-en-scène.*

He himself was dreaming of writing a play of an altogether new character. The theme of his proposed play was not very Chekhov-like. Two young friends love the same woman. Their love for the woman and their jealousy create complex inter-relationships. In the end both go on a polar expedition. In the last act the ship is icebound and the play ends with the two friends seeing a white vision gliding over the snow. It is the shadow or soul of the woman who has died while they were away.

This is all that could be learned from Chekhov about the play he never wrote. . . .

Chekhov enjoyed life abroad, Olga Knipper told us later. He would sit on his balcony in Badenweiler and watch what was going on at the post-office opposite, watch people entering it, bringing along the thoughts they had expressed in their letters, thoughts that were meant to travel to all parts of the world.

"It's wonderful!" he would exclaim.

The sad news of Chekhov's death in Badenweiler reached us in the summer of 1904.

*"Ich sterbe,"**—these were his last words. He died a beautiful, serene death.

Anton Pavlovich died, but after his death he became even more beloved at home, in Europe and America. But though successful and popular, he remained misunderstood and unappreciated.

The opinion still prevails that Chekhov was an author who wrote of humdrum life, of colourless people, that his plays reflected drab Russian life, that they were evidence of the country's spiritual degradation. It is claimed that his works depict dissatisfaction that paralyzes all endeavour, hopelessness that kills energy, the so-called gloom of the Slav soul.

I completely disagree with such characterization. Although I knew him when he was already ill, I saw him more often in gay spirits and smiling than gloomy. His presence, even when he was ill, meant laughter, for he was always joking and punning. There was no one who could beat him at making people laugh or at talking nonsense with a serious face. There was no one who hated ignorance, rudeness, whimpering, gossip and narrow-mindedness more than he did, and there was no one who loved life and culture more—

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* I am dying. (Ger.)

everywhere and in any form. The birth of a new scientific society, the construction of a theatre, library or museum was a great event for him. When he heard of steps taken to add to people's comfort he would become happy and excited. I remember he was happy as a child when I told him that an old one-storey house at the Krasniye Vorota in Moscow had been torn down to give way to a big apartment house. He spoke of it to everyone who came to see him. In all this he saw the growth of Russian and world culture, and not only spiritual but outward too.

It was the same with his plays. Though describing the sad and dark life of the eighties and nineties, they spoke of radiant dreams, of the bright future that would come in two or three hundred or even one thousand years, of a future for which we had to suffer; of new inventions which would enable man to fly, of the sixth sense that would be discovered.

And have you noticed how gaily people laugh at Chekhov's plays, far more gaily than at any others? And when Chekhov tackled vaudeville, his humour knew no bounds.

And what about his letters? There is something melancholy in them, of course, but at the same time they are like stars that twinkle brightly in an evening sky—witty and humorous. Sometimes they contain plain tomfoolery, anecdotes and jokes, for in his heart, even when he was ill, Chekhov was a cheerful man and a humorist.

It is only natural for a healthy man to feel buoyant and happy. But when a sick man, a man condemned to death (and Chekhov knew that, for he was a doctor), a man chained—like a prisoner—to a place he hated, far from those near and dear to him, a man who saw no hope ahead—well, when such a man can laugh and hope and live for the future and amass cultural values for the coming generations, then we must recognize that his cheerfulness and vitality are something extraordinary.

What I understand still less is why Chekhov is considered outdated and why people say he would never have understood the revolution and the new life it has brought.

It would be silly to deny, of course, the difference between Chekhov's epoch and the present and the new generations reared by the revolution. They have very little in common. It is also understandable that the present-day, revolutionary Russia, actively and energetically smashing the old and building the new, does not accept and does not even understand the inertness and the passiveness of the eighties.

The stifling atmosphere of those days made revolutionary enthusiasm impossible. It was only underground that forces were accumulating to deal a death blow to the old regime. Progressive people were preparing public opinion, inculcating new ideas, explaining the rottenness of the old life. And it was with these people who were preparing public opinion that Chekhov sided. Only very few could equal him in depicting the unbearable stagnant atmosphere, in ridiculing the life it was engendering.

Time was marching on and Chekhov, who was always striving for progress, was not a man to mark time: he marched along with life and the epoch.

He became more and more resolute as the atmosphere grew tenser and the revolution closer. People who think that he was as weak and undecided as the characters of his stories, are very much mistaken. I have already said that time and again he surprised us all by his firmness and steadfastness.

"It's terrible, but we can't do without it! Perhaps the Japanese will stimulate us to action," Chekhov told me excitedly, but firmly and resolutely, when war with Japan was already in the air.

He was one of the first writers at the turn of the century to sense the approach of the revolution, and that at a time when it was only in the making and society was still wallowing in luxury. He was one of the first to sound the call. Wasn't it he who began to cut down the beautiful, blooming cherry orchard, understanding that its time had passed, that the old life was doomed?

Anyone with ability to foresee things would have seen the correctness of Chekhov's predictions.

But perhaps Chekhov's methods of writing and creating were too subtle for the man of today? In portraying a progressive man, a revolutionary, we show him as one who protests energetically, exposes mercilessly his enemies, makes resolute demands. Chekhov, of course, did not paint such people. But this does not make his works any less convincing or less forceful.

In his appeals for new life Chekhov often proceeds from the rule of the contraries. Here is what he says: this man is nice and the others are not bad either, and their life is beautiful and their shortcomings are rather sweet and humorous. And yet all this is unnecessary, monotonous and lifeless. What is one to do? It is necessary to join forces and change all this, to strive for another and a better life.

Those who do not sense that, who do not understand this in Chekhov, lack feeling and imagination, do not know how to grasp the essence of an artistic work. This, in my opinion, comes of one's prosaic, narrow-minded attitude to art, depriving the latter of its main power.

Very often we actors make narrow-minded demands on a play and stress unimportant things.

In staging Chekhov's plays we should bring out his dreams, his *leit-motif.* Unfortunately, it is more difficult to do that than to depict the outer life of the play. That is why very often the *leit-motif* is not conveyed to the audiences, why everyday life is given more prominence. This often is not only the stage director's fault, but actors' too. Some of them usually portray Ivanov as a neurasthenic and make the spectator sorry for the sick man. Yet Chekhov depicted him as a strong man, as a fighter for a better life. But Ivanov failed –the struggle against the sad reality of Russian life was beyond his strength. The tragedy is not that the hero falls sick, but that the conditions are unbearable and demand a radical reform. Get an actor with insight for this rôle and you will not recognize Chekhov, or rather you will see him as he should be seen. Let Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard* have the sweep of Chaliapin and the young Anna the temperament of Yermolova, and let the first use his might to smash the old and the young woman, who sensed with Petya Trofimov the approach of a new era, shout, "Welcome, new life!" and you will see *The Cherry Orchard* become a modern play near and dear to us. And you will see, too, that Chekhov's voice encourages and inspires, for he never looks back, only ahead.

As with every other playwright, there is yet another side to Chekhov, the side that is turned to the stage and us actors: his understanding of the principles and tasks of theatre art, of its essence and technique, of the method of writing plays, etc. What is important in our profession, apart from trends and social and political tasks, it not *what* the author writes and not *what* the actor plays, but *how* they do it. We actors and stage directors should study Chekhov's dramaturgy and artistry.

Has this been done? Has any actor studied the technique of Chekhov's dramaturgy with its new methods, with the possibilities it offers stage directors, with its stage peculiarities that require a new psychology and feeling from the actor? Has any one of us deeply grasped Treplev's monologue about new art? Do the actors know this new commandment of ours? They know it by heart, of course, like they know the Lord's prayer, but do they understand the meaning behind the words?

"It is surprising indeed," Maeterlinck once told me, "how little actors think of their art, its technique, its philosophy, of their own skill and virtuosity."

Actors who claim conceitedly that Chekhov has become outdated, show they have not yet grown to understand him. It is they who lag in art, who, through misunderstanding or laziness, want to by-pass Chekhov. It is impossible to advance along the path of our art by side-stepping some of the phases of its natural and organic development.

Chekhov is a landmark along the way paved in our art by Shakespeare, Molière, Luigi Riccoboni,[47] the great Schröder,[48] Pushkin, Gogol, Shchepkin, Griboyedov, Ostrovsky and Turgenev. After studying Chekhov and mastering him, we should wait for a new leader, who will write in a new chapter in our eternal art and will take us on to a new landmark, from which new, wide horizons will open for further progress.

The works of writers like Chekhov outlive their generations, not vice versa. The life they depict may become passé, lose its actuality and its attraction for those who have no foresight. But true artistic works do not die because of that, they do not lose their poeticalness. Perhaps Chekhov's *what*–in some of his works–has grown outdated and is no longer acceptable in the post-revolutionary period, but his *how* has not yet begun to live as it should in our theatres.

That is why the chapter about Chekhov does not really close here. It has not been read properly, has not been grasped. The book has been closed too early.

It should be reopened, re-read and studied thoroughly.

THE STUDIO ON POVARSKAYA

I RECALL an insignificant event which, however, made a very strong impression on me. When we were producing Maeterlinck's *The Blind,* and I needed a sculptured figure of the dead pastor, the spiritual leader and shepherd of the helpless blind, I called in one of the fashionable modernistic sculptors to make the statue. He came to look at our stage model and our sketches. I told him of my production plans which, I may say, did not satisfy me. The sculptor, speaking roughly as was fashionable among innovators in those days, said that what we needed for our production was a sculpture made of tow. He went away without even saying good-bye. This incident made a very strong impression on me at the time, not because of the man's impudence, but because I felt there was truth in what he had said and because I began to feel more poignantly that our theatre had run into a blind alley. There were no new roads, and the old ones were rapidly falling into disuse.

And yet only very few of us thought about the future. The theatre was a success, we always had a full house, everything seemed to augur well. Others, Vladimir Ivanovich among them, understood our real position. It was necessary to do something for the theatre, for all the actors, for myself both as a stage director who had lost his perspective and as an actor who had turned to stone inwardly. I felt that I appeared on the stage devoid of all inner content, armed with outer theatrical habits, but without enthusiasm.

Again there came that period of search in which the *new* is the only goal. The new for the sake of the *new*. Its roots are sought not only in one's own art, but also in literature, music and painting. I would stand before a painting by Vrubel or some other modernist, and, according to my stage director's and actor's habit, try to squeeze myself into the frame, enter it, so as to become infected with the mood of the painting and physically accustomed to it, not from without, but from within—so to say from Vrubel himself. But the inner content expressed in the painting is indefinite; it is not palpable to the consciousness; it is felt only in the rare moments of inspiration, and once felt, it is soon forgotten. In these superconscious[49] moments of inspiration it seems that you let Vrubel go through you, through your body, your muscles, gestures, poses, and these begin to express the essence of the painting. You remember what you have found physically, you try to carry it to the mirror and with the help of the latter to reassure yourself of the lines expressed by your body, but to your amazement the glass reflects only a caricature of Vrubel, the old, hateful and outworn operatic stencil. And again you go over to the painting, and again you stand before it and feel that you are expressing its inner content in your own way, but this time you examine yourself on the witness stand of your own emotions, you look at yourself with your inner eyesight, and alas, you again recognize the old and hateful operatic acquaintance. At best, you catch yourself imitating the outer form of Vrubel's lines, forgetting the inner content of the painting.

At these moments you feel like a musician playing on a spoiled instrument, like a paralytic, who tries to express a beautiful thought but whose voice and tongue, against his will, create unpleasant and repulsive sounds.

"No," you say to yourself, "the problem is beyond my strength, for Vrubel's forms are too spiritual and abstract. They are too far removed from the real, well-fed body of man, whose lines are changelessly fixed once and for all." You cannot cut your shoulders off in order to slope them as they are sloped in the painting; you cannot lengthen your arms, your legs, your fingers; you cannot twist the waistline as the artist demands of you.

In other, inspiring moments, you decide differently. "No," you say to yourself, "the reason is not that our body is material, but that it is not trained, not malleable, not expressive. It is accustomed to the demands of everyday life, to expressing everyday feelings. But for the abstract or high experiences of the poet and their scenic expression, there exists a whole assortment of worn-out stencils: lifting hands, spreading fingers, sitting down pompously and walking theatrically instead of normally. There are two types of movements and gestures in us, one normal, natural and lifelike; the other abnormal, unnatural, not-lifelike, used in the theatre to imitate something lofty and abstract. This type of movement and gesture is largely borrowed from Italian singers, bad paintings, illustrations and postcards. Can one interpret the superconscious noble spirit of Vrubel, Maeterlinck and Ibsen by means of these vulgar forms?"

Then I turned to sculpture, seeking in it roots for a new art of acting, but the results and the conclusions were the same. I turned to music, trying to reflect its sounds through my body and movements, only to convince myself once again that all of us were poisoned by the ballet and the opera.

"My God!" I would exclaim doubtfully. "Is it possible that we stage artists are fated by the materiality of our bodies ever to express coarse realism and nothing else? Are we not called to go farther than the realists in painting went in their time? Can it be that we are only fore-runners in scenic art?"

"And what about the ballet and its best representatives, Taglioni,[50] Pavlova[51] and others?" another inner voice tried to comfort me. "Isn't there separation from the materiality of the body? And what about the acrobats who soar like birds from one trapeze to another? You would never believe they have a body. That means with us too there can be that separation from the body. It must be found and developed."

And again in the silence of night there began the examination of the body like the one long ago in the house at the Krasniye Vorota.

After that I began to pay attention to the voice, which we had long ago forgotten. Is the sound of human speech so material and coarse that it is incapable of expressing that which is "abstract," lofty and noble? For instance, there was Chaliapin, who was fast advancing to world fame. Had he not achieved what we were seeking in drama?

"Yes, but that was in the opera, in music," the voice of doubt said within me.

But why can't conversation be musical?

I tried to speak prose and declaim verses, and here again I met my hateful acquaintance, the theatrical declamatory stencil. The more I sought for purity of sound and the less our voice is prepared for it, the more there was of vocal acrobatics instead of our usual staccato stage speech.

Indeed, we have no violin-like, melodious voices on the stage. Most of our actors speak abruptly, as if playing a piano without pedals. Can such voices express lofty feelings, sorrow, the mysteries of life?

But in moments of inspiration, when, for some inexplicable reason, one feels not the conception of the words themselves, but the deep meaning that is hidden in them, one finds the simplicity and nobility for which one has searched. In such moments the voice reverberates and becomes musical. Why? That is a secret of Nature. She alone can make use of the human apparatus as a talented virtuoso uses his musical instrument. She alone can draw a strong sound from the voiceless. Let me tell a story to illustrate.

One of our actors had a weak voice that was hardly audible from the stage. Neither singing nor any other artificial means helped him. Once, when we were walking in the Caucasus, we were attacked by huge sheep dogs. My comrade shouted so loud in his fright that he could be heard a mile away. He had a very strong voice, but only nature could free it.

"This means," I said to myself, "that the thing is to feel the rôle. Then everything comes of itself." And I tried to feel my emotions and to inspire myself, but this only caused a squeezing in the throat and spasms in the body. I tried to enter into the very essence of words, but the result was the heavy, deep speech of a learned ninny.

During this period of search I again met Vsevolod Meierhold, who had at one time been an actor of the Moscow Art Theatre. In the fourth year of our existence he had left us for the provinces, where he organized a theatrical company, seeking for something new in art. The difference between us lay in the fact that I only strove for the new, without knowing any ways and means of achieving it, while Meierhold, it seemed, had already found new ways and methods but could not use them partly because of material difficulties and partly because his company was weak. Fate again brought me into touch with the man who was most necessary to me in my search. I decided to help Meierhold in his new endeavour, which, it seemed to me then, coincided with mine.

But in what form and where were we to realize our dreams? First of all they demanded preparatory laboratory work. For this there was no place in the theatre with its daily performances, its complex duties and its stringent budget. We needed a special institution, which Meierhold aptly named "theatrical studio." This was neither a full-fledged theatre nor a school for beginners, but a laboratory for more or less mature actors.

The creation of the studio[52] occupied most of my time. I repeated again all the mistakes I had committed at the Society of Art and Literature.

It would have been best to have a studio of the most modest proportions, without expanding its work at the beginning, in some premises not requiring heavy expenditure. But enthused, I rented a very fine house which was being let at a rather low price, that increased our expenses tenfold right away. There was the necessity of rebuilding the house, and of hiring a large number of men to take care of the theatre. And the young artists, with talented Sapunov and Sudeikin at their head, offered to decorate the foyer. Their young and unleashed imagination knew no bounds and they even painted the parquet floor green. The wooden flags of the floor became warped, and it was necessary to lay a new flooring.

Just as in the days of the Society of Art and Literature, we added many departments to the studio. The musical department was in the hands of Ilya Sats and several other talented composers. Not content with the usual orchestra instruments, which do not convey all the possible sounds in music, they occupied themselves in the search of new instruments with which to enrich orchestration. "Isn't the sound of a shepherd's flute which we hear at sunrise in summer beautiful?" they asked. "Isn't this sound necessary in music? Is there an instrument that can produce a sound comparable to it? The oboe, the clarinet produce sounds that are factory-made, sounds in which one does not feel the presence of nature." They examined various other national and ancient instruments like the lyres on which blind men accompany themselves when they sing psalms, and Caucasian instruments with their specific sounds which do not appear in a modern orchestra. It was decided to arrange a tour of Russia to muster a complete troupe of unrecognized folk musicians and actors, to form an orchestra, to bring something new into music.

The tour took place, several talents were found and even brought to Moscow–people that had never even been heard of before. There was an altogether exceptional shepherd virtuoso on the flute who could compete in strength and musicalness of sound with the wind instruments of the orchestra, retaining the naïveté and fragrance of fields and woods in his playing. There was an unusual trio, a mother and two children with remarkable voices–the high soprano of the little girl, the alto of the boy, and the contralto of the mother, who could hold a note without any breathing intervals, just like a bagpipe. It was impossible to see when she breathed in. I had never seen such a breath in my life. There were fairy-tale tellers and *diseurs* who half-chanted, half-declaimed their wares. There were women mourners who, with the help of rather original cadences and vocal changes and scales, wept for the dead at funerals. There was one altogether extraordinary person, whose aesthetics could be questioned, but whose genius and originality were beyond any doubt. He could imitate a drunk–sobbing and beating his breast, wailing and shrieking with despair, telling sad stories about his beloved, about his brother who died on the battle-field, about his friend, or about the mother who deserted her children and gave herself over to debauch. Tears would flow from his eyes; his temperament would grasp the soul—one could not see his unusually strong though unaesthetic performance without shuddering or shedding tears.

Instead of restraining the young enthusiasts, I became enthusiastic myself, and even stimulated others. The new ideas seemed extremely interesting.

There was another search for backers, and while waiting for them, we spent money which we hoped to make good with future profits. We incurred debts but got only part of the troupe together. There were no backers, and all the expenses of the studio fell on my shoulders, although I still had not paid up the larger part of the debt I had incurred in the Society of Art and Literature.

We got together a whole company of young actors from Moscow and Petersburg. Among them were the now famous Illarion Pevtsov, Nikolai Kostromskoi, Vladimir Podgorny, Vladimir Maximov and Yekaterina Munt.

The rehearsals took place in Pushkino, just as in the days when we were founding the Moscow Art Theatre. I built a barn that was almost a replica of the old one, took the actors out to the village for all of the summer, and left Moscow for the season, in order to become acquainted with the results of the work when I returned in autumn. I thought then that to be successful the young actors needed complete independence, that my presence and authority might oppress and stifle the young imagination, the will and the power of the stage director and the young actors. And this would naturally draw them along my path. What I wanted was just the opposite: I wanted their young intuition to show me the path to new forms. With their hints and my experience I could lay the foundations of a new trend in art.

All through the summer I received reports on rehearsals and letters in which I was informed of the new principles and methods of performing as developed in the studio. They were original, but could they be applied in practice?

Briefly, the credo of the new studio was that realism and local colour had outlived their use. It was time for the unreal on the stage. It was necessary to depict not life itself as it takes place in reality, but as we vaguely feel it in our dreams and visions, in moments of spiritual uplift. It was this spiritual state that it was necessary to portray, just as it was shown by modernistic painters on their canvases, by the musicians of the new school in their compositions and by new poets in their poetry. The works of these painters, musicians and poets have no clear outlines, no definite and finished melodies, no clear thoughts. The strength of these works lies in the combination and blending of colours, lines, musical notes, and the euphony of words. They create a mood that subconsciously infects the audience. They give hints which compel the spectator to create a picture in his own imagination.

Meierhold knew how to talk of his dreams and thoughts and found good words for their definition. From the reports and letters I saw that we agreed in our fundamentals and that we sought for things which had already been established in other arts, but not yet in ours.

"And what if these discoveries are simply the result of enthusiasm and self-deception?" I doubted. "What if this acting does not come from inner experience but simply from the eye and the ear, from outer imitation of new forms? It is no easy task to carry over to the stage those principles which have been created in painting, music and other arts that are so far ahead of us. It's easy for them! An artist can paint any lines and forms he may imagine. And what are we to do with our material body?"

I saw no means of creating the things I felt in my own imagination, saw in paintings, heard in music and read of in new poetry. I did not know how to incarnate on the stage those delicate shades of feeling which were hardly expressed in the much more developed medium of words. I was powerless to bring to life the things that interested me then and I thought that it would take actors tens, hundreds of years, perhaps a whole new culture, to traverse the road that had already been traversed by the other arts.

"But then, who knows? Perhaps the new, young culture will create new actors capable of surmounting all the difficulties connected with the materiality of our body, for the sake of strengthening spiritual creation?" I would say in moments of inspiration.

In these moments of hope, I believed that every generation had something of *its own* that could not be seen by the eyes of the generation that preceded it. Perhaps that which we cannot find, which we can only desire, will be normal to them.

Let there be many mistakes in the studio's work! Let the results be negative! But isn't it useful to know what should not be done? So I consoled myself in my moments of doubt.

The autumn came, and I returned to Moscow. The studio showed the results of its summer work in the rehearsal barn at Pushkino. It did not show the plays in their entirety, but only selected scenes which were most characteristic of the problems of the innovators. There was a great deal that was new, interesting, and unexpected. There was the ingenuity and talented imagination of the stage director.

I watched the rehearsal with great interest and went away reassured.

The studio continued its work in Pushkino, and I resumed my activity in the Moscow Art Theatre, awaiting news of the dress rehearsal. But no invitation came.

At last there were dress rehearsals of Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles,* Hauptmann's *Schluck and Jau,* and several one-act plays by other writers. After seeing them everything became clear. The young and inexperienced actors passed the public test, with the help of the stage director, in excerpts, but when they attempted to play in dramas of great inner content and subtle character pattern, and of an unrealistic form, they showed they were childishly helpless. The talented stage director tried to save the actors with his work. In his hands they were only clay with which he moulded his interesting groups and *mises-en-scène,* to realize his ideas. But with the players lacking acting technique, the stage director could only demonstrate his ideas, principles, searches. There was nothing that could give life to them. And without that, all the interesting plans of the studio turned into dry theory, into a scientific formula. I convinced myself again that there was quite a gap between the dreams of the stage director and their realization, that the theatre is above all intended for the actor and cannot exist without him and that the new art needs new actors with a new technique. There were no such actors in the studio, and I realized it was doomed to fail abjectly. The only way out was to create a studio for stage directors and their production work. But at that time I was interested in stage directors only in so far as they helped the creativeness of the actors instead of hiding the actors' faults. The studio of stage directors, wonderful though it might be, did not answer my needs and dreams, especially since I was becoming more and more disappointed in the work of artists, in canvas, in paint, in cardboard, in the outward means of production, and in stage direction hokum. All my hopes were pinned on the actor and on the building of a solid foundation for his ingenuity and technique.

It was dangerous to open the studio, dangerous for that very idea for the sake of which it was organized. A good idea, badly shown, dies.

Moreover, the 1905 Revolution broke out and Moscow had no time for the theatre. The opening of the new enterprise was indefinitely postponed. If I delayed the dénouement, I would not be able to liquidate the studio so as to pay everybody, and so I was forced to close it down in a hurry.

My colleagues in the Moscow Art Theatre were very happy about the studio's failure, for they were very jealous of my activity in it. When the studio closed, I returned to my old friends.

"Stanislavsky tried, burned his fingers and saw that it's no use without us veterans," some actors said.

But we, i.e., Nemirovich-Danchenko and I, clearly saw that we were at a cross-roads, that we had to bring new blood into the company and that there was no use in our remaining in Moscow, not only because the revolution was inevitable and the atmosphere in the country tense, but also because we ourselves did not know what to do. There was only one alternative, to go on a foreign tour.

An event which occurred later on in the theatre only strengthened this conviction. The Moscow Art Theatre had announced the *première* of Gorky's *The Children of the Sun.* There was a rumour that the extreme Rightist elements–the Black Hundred–who considered our theatre too Left and Gorky an enemy of his country, intended to raid the theatre during the performance. The spectators sat in suspense, waiting for the scandal to break out. In the fourth act, which showed a riot during the cholera epidemic, a crowd of extras rushed on to the stage. The audience took them for the Black Hundred. Someone shouted. Bedlam broke loose, some women and even men went into hysterics. The curtain was hurriedly lowered. The spectators were eventually told that the crowd were not the Black Hundred, but extras, and the play went on, though before a considerably reduced audience.

We took advantage of this tragicomical occurrence to raise once again the question about our foreign tour.

In October the country was swept by a strike wave, followed by an armed uprising. The theatre was temporarily closed. Shooting in the streets ended a few days later, but the state of emergency remained. No one was allowed out after 8 p.m.

All this outwardly justified our decision to go on our tour.

THE FIRST FOREIGN TOUR

TO SETTLE the question of our tour abroad, the entire administration of the theatre met in my apartment in the Karetny Ryad and spent the whole night there. It was necessary to settle the question at once, and to send a man to Berlin to hire a theatre and order the scenery. Those who remained in Moscow were to get the money and to arrange the trip. The meeting lasted all night and even after the guests went to bed and put out the candles, the debates continued, for no one felt like sleeping.

A few days later the actor Vishnevsky went abroad as our advance man, and on January 24, 1906, the entire company, and I with my wife and children, went to Berlin via Warsaw.

Berlin welcomed us with beautiful weather. In the day-time it was possible to walk in autumn coats, although it was the end of January. Because of a marriage in the German imperial family, the city was filled to overflow, and instead of stopping at an hotel, we had to rent a house which had just become vacant after a theatrical club left it. We found enough place in its rooms and began housekeeping, Nemirovich-Danchenko, my family and I, Knipper, Vishnevsky, and so on. I cannot say that there was much comfort, but it was original, and we were very happy.

At first the Germans treated the Russians, and us also, in a manner that could not be called hospitable, although the well-known theatre critic, Wilhelm Scholz, had given us quite a bit of advance publicity. The stage hands in the theatre had a rather primitive idea of Russian art. They apparently took us for circus acrobats and wondered why we had not brought along any trapezes, ladders, ropes, or walking wire. The scenery we had ordered was not half ready, for the designers and painters were doing rush orders for American theatres. No one cared about the Russian revolutionaries. We were saved by our own stage hands, headed by Titov,[53] who had come together with us from Moscow. They had created our theatre together with us, loved our theatre, were raised on the same milk of art that we had imbibed. After a few nights of concentrated work, for the theatre was occupied by another troupe in the day-time, four stage hands did what we could not get from a whole factory for a whole month. There were obstacles. In order to have the right to work on the stage at night we were forced to pay overtime wages to the regular stage hands of the theatre. We picked our supernumeraries from among the Russian emigrants in the city. After the Russo-Japanese War and the revolution, the treatment of Russians abroad was almost disdainful and it was our mission to try to uphold Russian reputation as much as we could. First of all it was necessary to impress everybody with discipline and industriousness. The actors understood the circumstances, and their conduct was exemplary. Our rehearsals went on, with short breathing-spaces, from early morning till late at night in an orderly manner that was unknown to the theatre in which we had to play. Soon our backstage life became the talk of the town. The attitude towards us became better, though still far from ideal.

Lack of funds and experience did not permit us to launch an advertising campaign which was necessary in a big European city. Our posters, painted by Simov, had artistic value, but were not gaudy or striking enough to have any advertising value. Besides, there were not enough of these posters and they were lost amidst the loud advertisements of commercial establishments. Nevertheless, the theatre was packed on the first night, but after that it was always half empty.

We opened with *Tsar Fyodor*. We were risking our reputation, not only in Europe, but in Russia also, for if we had failed the Russians would never have forgiven us. Besides, what could we do if we returned to Russia without any money, for all that we had was spent before we raised the curtain on the first night. I will not describe the nervousness of the actors and the suspense that reigned backstage during the first performance. But even before the curtain rose, the stage hands were congratulating us. For what? It turned out that that fine veteran of the German stage, the favourite of all Berlin, the famous and remarkable actor Haase, had come to the theatre with his wife. We were told that their coming was a sign of good luck, for the old couple went to the theatre only on the most extraordinary of occasions. Apparently, Berlin intelligentsia, if not the public at large, was interested in our performance. A storm of applause greeted us after the first scene of *Tsar Fyodor*. And when the curtain rose on the second scene, the applause was deafening. The success of the performance grew with each act. Our old friend, the famous German actor, Barnay, visited us in our dressing-rooms, and at the end of the performance there were flowers, and curtain calls, and success. The entire staff of the theatre altered their attitude towards us. Instead of the former disdain there was almost adoration.

The newspapers that were to decide our fate abroad were awaited with excitement and trepidation. Let me illustrate. Early in the morning, as soon as the papers were brought, my wife and I were awakened by the actors who lived with us. Forgetting all convention, they tore into our bedroom, some in coats, others in bathrobes, others in dressing-gowns, with triumphant, excited faces. The wife of one of the actors, who knew German very well, translated the reviews. They said we had taken Berlin by storm. We were amazed at how well German critics knew Russian literature and life. At times it seemed that the reviews had been written by Russians or at least by people who knew the Russian language: they showed not only excellent understanding of the literary side of the play, but also of the acting. When I asked one of the journalists how they produced such connoisseurs of theatrical art, he told me of a very clever and purposeful method used in Germany. "We tell a young critic," he said, "to write an article full of praise: it is easy to criticize, even for a person who knows nothing about the thing, but it takes a specialist to praise it."

But the success of *Tsar Fyodor* and the plays of Chekhov, Gorky and Ibsen and the excellent reviews helped but little in the finances of the theatre. The takings were very poor until Kaiser Wilhelm showed interest in the theatre. One of the performances was attended by the wife of the Crown Prince. Then the German Empress visited the theatre. And finally the Kaiser himself.

One Sunday we were informed by the palace that the Emperor would like to see *Tsar Fyodor* the following day. We had advertised *The Enemy of the People*. The play was postponed and the box-office started selling tickets for *Tsar Fyodor.* The printing-shop was closed on Sunday and there was no chance of getting posters announcing the change in programme until Monday. The theatre's office rang up the palace and described the position. Half an hour later there was another phone call from the palace, reiterating the Kaiser's request for *Tsar Fyodor.* He apparently knew Berlin better than we did. The poster that came out the next day had a narrow red strip with the announcement that the change in the programme was at the Kaiser's request. And this was enough for all the tickets to be sold in a few hours.

He was a thick-set man of no great height, with rather large freckles on his face and ordinary moustaches combed slightly upward, but far from the exaggerated manner in which they are drawn in his portraits. Dressed in a Russian uniform, he sat in the most prominent seat in his box, surrounded by his entire family, and behaved very naturally, almost continually asking questions of those sitting around him, or leaning from his box towards the orchestra to make signs of approval to the actors from his theatres who sat below him. Several times he applauded demonstratively. He was either a very enthusiastic man or a very good actor. During intermissions we were called to the imperial box, and he asked us a series of questions about the theatre in a very business-like way. At the end of the performance, when the audience had already left the theatre, the Emperor and the *oberintendants** of many imperial theatres remained in the box, asking questions about our profession. We had to tell them about our theatrical life and work from A to Z, while the Kaiser interrupted us now and then and turned to the directors, pointing out to them the things we had and they did not.

After Wilhelm's visit to our theatre the receipts became larger, and at the end of our guest season, which lasted five or six weeks, our success was not only artistic, but financial too. We were dined and honoured by German actors, by various societies and individuals, and by the Russian colony. But the dinners given in our honour by Haase and Gerhart Hauptmann impressed us most. In Berlin, dinners were usually given in restaurants or hotels, so as not to put out those who give them, but in a special case that calls for more than usual hospitality, a dinner was given at home. Haase was so enthused by our performances that he invited all of theatrical Berlin to his little home, an actor and an actress from each of Berlin's most important theatres. This gala occasion was also attended by the actors of the Meiningen troupe who had come to Berlin to rehearse a play for the jubilee of the old Duke of Meiningen. Knowing of my admiration for the Meiningen Players, Haase wanted to please me by introducing me to the actors who had given me so much pleasure in their time. There were many speeches and after dinner I was surrounded by actors and asked to tell them in detail about our creative work. This difficult job was done in German, which I had managed to forget almost completely by that time. I retain a grateful memory of this reception tendered me by the great German actor and his charming wife.

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* Directors. (Ger.)

The other reception and dinner which I have mentioned also has its story. Hauptmann attended many of our performances. The influence Russian literature exerted on Hauptmann and his love for it are well known. At his first performance (*Uncle Vanya*) Hauptmann first became acquainted with Russian dramatic art. I was told that during the intermissions, Hauptmann, notwithstanding his timidity, expressed rather loudly his opinion of Chekhov and the theatre, and the opinion was flattering to both. Before leaving Berlin, Nemirovich-Danchenko and I went to pay our respects to the man whose plays we had been the first to produce on the Russian stage. We found complete chaos in his little apartment. His wife, from whom, rumour had it, he drew Rautendelein in *The Sunken Bell,* and Pippa in *And Pippa Dances,* was very much interested in orchestral music, and, if I am not mistaken, in conductor ship. They were getting ready for a rehearsal, for one room was completely occupied by music stands. Because of lack of space some of the musicians occupied the writer's study.

Hauptmann reminded us of Anton Chekhov, resembling him in his modesty, timidity and laconism. It is a pity that our conversation could not be very long, variegated or eloquent, first because we felt uneasy in Hauptmann's presence, and second because our German was not good enough for literary and artistic discussion. Hauptmann said that he had always dreamed of our kind of acting for his plays—without unnecessary theatrical strain and conventionality, simple, deep and rich in content. German actors had told him that such acting was impossible because the theatre had its own demands and inviolable conventionalities. Now, in the declining years, he saw at last what he had always dreamed of.

MATURITY

THE DISCOVERY OF OLD TRUTHS

THE DEATH OF CHEKHOV tore a large part out of the heart of our theatre. The illness and the death of Morozov tore out another. Dissatisfaction and anxiety after the failure of the Maeterlinck plays, the closure of the studio on Povarskaya, discontent with my own acting, and the uncertain future lying before me, were giving me no rest, killing my faith in myself, making me act lifelessly.

In my many years on the stage–starting with the Alexeyev Circle and amateur free-lancing and ending with the Society of Art and Literature and several years in the Moscow Art Theatre–I had come to know and understand quite a bit, hitting upon many things accidentally. I had always sought for new forms in emotional acting, stage direction and principles of production. I would try one thing, then drop it to try another, often forgetting important discoveries and admiring the casual or superficial. By the time of which I am writing I had accumulated a bagful of artistic experience and acting and directing tricks. But all this was in utter disorder, not systematized, making it impossible for me to use the artistic wealth I had amassed. It was necessary to put everything in order, sort out, classify and assess this material. It was necessary to polish up the raw material and use it as a corner-stone for my edifice of art and to refresh that which had become worn out. Without that there was no possibility of progressing.

It was in this condition that I went for the summer to Finland. I would spend my mornings on a sea-shore cliff, taking stock of my artistic past. I wanted to find out where my former joy of creating had vanished. Why was it that I felt empty when I did not act, and now was not happy when I did? It is said that it is always so with professionals who play every day and who often repeat the same rôles. This explanation, however, did not satisfy me. Apparently these professionals do not love their rôles and their art. Duse, Yermolova and Salvini had played their star rôles many times more than I had played mine, but this did not prevent them from perfecting their rôles. Why was it then that the more I played a rôle, the stiffer my acting was? Going over my past, I realized more and more that the inner content which I put into a rôle in creating it and the outer form the rôle eventually assumed were as wide apart as heaven is from earth. Formerly everything was engendered by a beautiful, exciting, inner truth. Now all that remained of this truth was its empty shell, ashes and dust that stuck in the soul and body for some chance reason that had absolutely nothing in common with genuine art. For instance, there was my rôle of Doctor Stockman in *The Enemy of the People.* I remembered that when I played it at first it was easy to assume the viewpoint of a man with honest intentions, who sought only for the good in the souls of others, who was blind to all the evil feelings and passions of the little men around him. The feeling that I had put into the rôle came from living memories. I had seen one of my friends persecuted–an honest man whose conscience would not permit him to do what the powers that be were demanding of him. When I was on the stage this living memory would guide me, invariably inspiring me to creative endeavour.

But with the passing of time I had forgotten the living memories which stimulated and guided Stockman in spiritual life and which served as the *leit-motif* of the play.

Sitting on the cliff in Finland and analyzing my artistic past, I accidentally hit upon the emotions I had felt when playing Stockman and then forgotten. How did I lose them? How did I get along without them? But why was it that I remembered so well the movements of muscles in the legs, arms and body, the facial expression and the way this short-sighted man screwed up his eyes.

During our last foreign tour, and before that in Moscow, I had mechanically repeated these fixed appurtenances of the rôle, the physical signs of non-existent emotion. In some places I tried to appear as nervous as possible and even exalted, and for this purpose I made jerky movements. In others I tried to look naïve and to achieve that I used my acting technique to give my eyes a look of childlike innocence; in still other places I exaggerated the manner of walking and gesturing–the outer results of an emotion that was long dormant. I copied naïveté, but I was not naïve; I moved my feet quickly, but I did not feel any urge to do so. I played more or less skilfully, trying to bring out emotion and portray action, but I did not feel any emotion or any real need for action. From performance to performance I had mechanically built up a habit of going through all this technical gymnastics, and muscular memory, which is so strong among actors, had firmly fixed this theatrical habit.

Sitting on the Finnish rock, I examined other rôles in an effort to recreate the living material from which they had been created in their time, that is, my own memories that once stimulated me to creative endeavour. I thought of all those places and moments in the plays and rôles which I mastered with such a great deal of pain; I recalled what Chekhov and Nemirovich-Danchenko told me, the advice of my colleagues, my own creative pains, and the various stages I went through in creating and perfecting my rôles. I re-read my diary which reminded me of all that I had experienced in the process of creation. I compared all this with what accumulated in my muscles and soul, and I was amazed. God, how terribly my soul and my rôles had been disfigured by bad theatrical habits and tricks, by the desire to please the audience, by incorrect methods of approach to creativeness, day after day, at every repeat performance!

How was I to save my rôles from degradation, from spiritual petrification, from stodgy habits and customs? There was the necessity of spiritual preparation before undertaking a creative task, each time, every time it was repeated. There was the necessity not only of a physical make-up but of a spiritual make-up before every performance. Before creating it was necessary to know how to enter the temple of that spiritual atmosphere in which alone it is possible to create.

It was with these thoughts and cares in my soul that I returned from my summer vacation for the 1906-1907 season in Moscow, and began to watch myself and others at work.

Like Dr. Stockman, I made a great discovery. I discovered the old truth that the actor's mood on the stage–when he stands before the footlights and an audience of 1,000–was unnatural and greatly hindered creation in public. Moreover, I realized that in such a spiritual and physical state it was only possible to pose, to pretend to live the part; that it was impossible really to live the part, to yield to emotion. I had known this, of course, but only in my mind. Now I felt it. And in our language to understand is to feel. That is why I can say that I had discovered a truth I had long known. Just how unnatural the actor's creative mood is on the stage may be seen from the following example.

Imagine you are standing on some high elevation in the Red Square before a crowd of some 100,000. Then a woman–someone, perhaps, you had never met before–is placed next to you and you are told that you must fall in love with her, in front of all these people, and fall in love so madly that you are willing to die for her. But you can't do it. You feel embarrassed: you are watched by 100,000 people who are expecting you to make them weep; their hearts want to be thrilled by your lofty, selfless and passionate love. They have paid to see that and are entitled to demand what they had paid for. It is only natural that they want to hear what you are saying, and you are forced to shout tender words of love, words that in real life you whisper to a woman when you are alone with her. You have to be seen and heard by all and because of that you must make gestures and movements that will be seen by those who are the farthest away. Is it possible to think of love and to feel it in such conditions? There is nothing you can do but try, exert every effort and strain yourself from impotence and the impossibility of fulfilling the task.

But our thoughtful profession has invented a whole lot of stencils, expressions of human passion, movements, poses, intonations, cadences, graces, stage hokums and tricks that allegedly express "lofty" feelings and thoughts. These stencils of a non-existent feeling are assimilated in one's mother's womb and *develop mechanically, subconsciously, assisting the actor on the stage in* moments of his impotence, when his soul is empty.

What is one to do in such conditions to convince the audience that one is madly in love? Nothing but to roll up one's eyes, press one's hand to the heart, raise one's eyebrows and look a martyr, shout, gesticulate–and all that not to bore the audience. And God forbid you make a pause, which is so desirable at other moments–at moments of artistic inspiration, when silence is more eloquent than words.

Thus, the natural, usual actor's mood on the stage is the mood in which the actor has to portray what he does not feel. It is that condition in which spiritually the actor thinks of his everyday cares, his family, his daily bread, minor grievances, success and failure, and physically portrays lofty impulses, heroic feelings and passions, and superconscious life.

It is this spiritual and physical dislocation between the body and soul that actors experience and live through the better part of their lives–in our theatre from 12 noon to 4.30 p.m., when they rehearse, and from 8 p.m. to midnight, when they perform. And that almost day in and day out. Finding ourselves in the unbearable position of a man who is forcibly exhibited and is obliged, against his will and desire, to impress the spectators, we resort to false, artificial acting methods, and get used to them. The question "What am I to do?" has haunted me ever since I realized what this dislocation was.

Clearly feeling the harm and the anomaly of the *actor's mood,* I naturally began to search for another spiritual and physical mood–one that would be beneficent and not pernicious for creativeness. To differentiate it from the *actor's mood,* let us agree to call it the *creative mood.* I understood then that to the stage genius this creative mood almost always comes of itself, in all its fullness and richness. Less talented people receive it less often, on Sundays only, so to say. Those who are still less talented receive it even less often, *every twelfth holiday,* as it were. Mediocrities are visited by it only on very rare occasions. Nevertheless, all stage people, from the genius to the average talent, arrive at the creative mood intuitively, but it is not given them to control it as they will. They receive it in the form of a heavenly gift, and it seems that we cannot achieve it by the ordinary means we have at our disposal.

Nevertheless I put the following question to myself: are there no technical means of achieving the creative mood? This does not mean, of course, that I want to create inspiration by artificial means. No, that would be impossible. What I would like to learn is how to create favourable conditions for the creation of inspiration at will, that condition in the presence of which inspiration is most likely to enter an actor's soul. When an actor says: "Today I am in good spirits! Today I am at my best!" or "I am acting with pleasure!" or "I am living my part!", it means that he is accidentally in a creative mood.

But how is the actor to make this condition no longer a matter of mere accident, to create it at his will?

If it is impossible to master it at once, then one must build it up bit by bit, out of various elements. If it is necessary to develop each of the component elements in oneself separately, systematically, by a series of certain exercises–let it be so! If the ability to receive the creative mood in its full measure is given to a born genius, then perhaps ordinary people can achieve a similar state after a great deal of hard work–not in its full measure, but at least in part. Of course, an average man will never become a genius, but it will help him to become something like one.

But how is one to master the nature and the component elements of the creative mood? The solution of this problem became "one of the passions of Stanislavsky's," as my friends said. There was nothing I did not do to solve the mystery. I watched myself closely, I looked into my soul, so to say, on and off the stage. I watched other actors, when I rehearsed new parts with them. I watched them from the auditorium. I carried out all sorts of experiments with them and with myself. I tortured them, I irritated them and they said I was turning rehearsals into an experimental laboratory, that actors were not guinea-pigs. And they were right to protest. But the chief objects of my researches remained famous actors, Russian, and foreign. They were in a creative mood on the stage oftener than others, almost always, and whom was I to study if not them? That is exactly what I did.

And this is what I saw: in Duse, Yermolova, Fedotova, Savina, Salvini, Chaliapin and Rossi, as well as in the more talented actors of our theatre, I felt the presence of something that was common to them all, something in which they reminded me of each other. What was this quality? I could only guess at first. The question seemed too complicated. At the beginning, as I watched others and myself, I saw that freedom of the body, relaxation of muscles and complete subordination of the entire physical apparatus to the actors' will played an important role in promoting the creative mood. Such discipline permits splendidly organized creative work which enables the actor to express freely with his body what his soul is feeling. Watching others at such moments, as a stage director, I myself felt this creative mood. And when it surged inside me on the stage, I felt like a prisoner when the chains that had interfered with his life and movements for years were at last removed.

I was so enthused by my discovery that I began to turn performances into experiments. I did not play; I tried before the spectators the exercises I had thought up. The only thing that embarrassed me was that almost none of the actors who played with me or the spectators who watched me, noticed the changes which had taken place in me. Only a few of the more attentive complimented me on one or two poses, movements and gestures that I had stressed.

By chance I hit upon another elementary truth—a truth I felt very deeply, i.e., understood. I realized that I felt so good and comfortable on the stage because, apart from causing me to relax muscles, my public exercises focussed my attention on what the body was feeling, and this diverted my attention from what was happening on the other side of the footlights, in the auditorium, beyond the black and terrible hole of the proscenium arch. And so diverted, I stopped being afraid of the audience, and at times even forgot that I was on the stage. I noticed that it was at such times that my creative mood was especially good.

My observations were soon confirmed, or explained. One day I was watching closely the performance by a famous visiting star in Moscow. As an actor, I felt he was in a creative mood: his muscles were relaxed due to general concentration. I felt clearly that his entire attention was focussed on the stage and the stage alone, and this concentrated attention aroused my interest in his stage life, and urged me to find out what it was that held his attention. I realized that the more the actor wishes to amuse his audience, the more the audience will expect to be amused, without even trying to share in the creative process. But as soon as the actor stops reckoning with his audience, the latter begins to watch the actor with increasing interest. It is especially so when the actor is occupied with something serious and interesting.

Continuing to watch myself and others, I saw (i.e., I felt) that creation means above all *full concentration of the entire spiritual and physical nature.* It embraces not only the man's sight and hearing, but all his five senses. Moreover, it embraces his body, his thoughts, his mind, his will, his emotions, his memory and his imagination. The entire spiritual and physical nature should be concentrated in the process of creation on what is going on in the soul of the character the actor portrays.

I tested this new truth before the spectators, using the exercises I had thought up. I developed my attention systematically. Here I shall not deal with my working methods. I hope to devote more than one chapter of my future book to this question.

One day I chanced to see a backstage scene at one of the Moscow theatres. It gave me a few important hints about our art and helped me to grasp (i.e., to feel) another well-known truth. It was almost 8 p.m., the show was about to start, but the leading man was not yet in. It is well known that home-bred genii consider it humiliating to come on time. A genius is entitled to make his audience wait. If not, what's the use of being one? It is quite fashionable to be late. The assistant stage director was rushing to and fro, tearing his hair, phoning here and there in an effort to find the star. The players were in their dressing-rooms, nervous, not knowing whether to complete their make-up or start preparing for the other play that would have to be performed if the man failed to come in. *He* was obviously being capricious. But at 7.55 p.m. sharp the home-bred genius condescended to appear in the theatre. Everybody was happy: "The show is going on; *he will play.*"

One, two, three—the genius is made up, ready for the stage, with his sword and cloak. *He* knows what he is about. There was all-round admiration:

"He's a real actor! Look! He came last, but he's first on the stage! Young actors should learn from him!"

But why doesn't someone tell this genius:

"Look here! We know that there is no man in the world who can transport himself in five minutes from the restaurant with its *risqué* jokes into the sphere of the superconscious. That requires gradual approach. Remember old man Salvini! You can't reach the sixth floor from the cellar in one step."

"And what about Kean?" the home-bred genius may ask. "Remember, he always came at the last moment, and everybody waited for him and worried."

Oh, this theatrical Kean![54] How much damage he has done by his example! And then, was Kean really the kind of a man he is shown in the melodrama? If yes, I do not doubt that he shouted and worried before the performance because he was not ready, because he was angry at himself for drinking on the day of the performance. Creative nature has its laws that apply equally to Kean and to Salvini. Make the living Salvini your example and not the dead Kean of the mediocre melodrama.

But no, the home-bred genius will always ape Kean and not Salvini. He will always come five minutes before the curtain and not three hours before as Salvini did. Why?

The reason is simple: In order to prepare something in your soul for three hours, you must have *what* to prepare. The home-bred genius has nothing but his talent. He comes to the theatre with a costume in his suitcase, but without any spiritual baggage. What can he do in his dressing-room from 5 to 8 p.m.? Smoke? Tell jokes? Why, it's better to do that in a restaurant.

How is one to explain the following absurdity and nonsense: some actors come to the theatre five minutes before the curtain; others, on the contrary, come long before the show begins, mechanically repeat their lines, carefully dress and make themselves up, always afraid that they will be late—and despite all that completely forget about the soul. The body is ready, the face is made up, but ask them:

"You've got your costumes on and you're made up, but have you washed, costumed and made up your soul?"

We don't think about that. We are afraid to be late, we are afraid to go on to the stage unprepared, badly costumed and made up. But we are not afraid to be late for the process of incarnating a rôle; we always come out unprepared inwardly, with an empty soul, and we are never ashamed of our spiritual nakedness.

We do not hold dear the inner image of the rôle which naturally assumes scenic outer forms in the process of incarnation. We fix these forms in our mechanical theatrical habits the moment we grasp them, forgetting the soul—the main content of the rôle, and with time it withers.

Having escaped from the grip of wise creative feeling and fallen into the grip of senseless acting habits, we become a vessel that has neither rudder nor sail. We drift wherever chance, the bad taste of the crowd, stage hokum, cheap outward success, actors' vanity or any other casual trend that has nothing in common with art, push us. It is they that inspire the actor's soul on the stage, and not the former living feeling that has created the spiritual life of the rôle.

Why do we go on to stage? With *what* and for *what* do we go on to the stage?

I watched another famous visiting star. There he was speaking the introductory words of his monologue. But he did not hit upon genuine emotion and, yielding mechanically to stage habits, fell into false pathos. I watched him carefully and saw that something was going on in him. He was like a singer who uses a pitch-pipe to find the required note. Now it seemed he had found it. No, it was a trifle too low. He took a higher note. No, it was too high. He took a note a little lower. He recognized the true tone, came to understand it, to feel it; he directed it, believed in it and began to enjoy his eloquence. *He believed!* The actor must first of all believe in everything that takes place on the stage, and most of all he must believe in what he himself is doing. And one can believe only in the truth. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly feel this truth, to know how to find it, and for this it is imperative to develop one's artistic perception of truth. But then it may be asked:

"What kind of truth is this, when everything on the stage is a lie, an imitation—the scenery, cardboard, paint, make-up, properties, wooden goblets, swords and spears? Is all this truth?"

But it is not of this truth that I speak. I speak of the truth of emotions, of the truth of inner creative enthusiasm which surges forward in its effort to find expression. I am not interested in a truth that is without myself; I am interested in one that is within myself, the truth of my attitude to this or that event on the stage, to the properties and scenery, to my partners, to their thoughts and emotions.

The actor says to himself:

"All these properties, make-up, costumes, creation in public, etc., are lies. I know that, and I don't care about it, for I don't need them. But *if* they were true, then I would do this and that, and I would behave in this manner and in that way towards this and that event."

I came to realize that creativeness begins at the moment when the magical, *creative "if"* appears in the soul and imagination of the actor. Creativeness does not begin while actual reality exists, while there is genuine truth which a man naturally cannot but believe. Then the creative *if* appears, that is, the imagined truth in which the actor believes more sincerely and with greater enthusiasm than he would in genuine truth just as a little girl believes in the existence of her doll and in everything around her. From the moment this *if* appears, the actor passes from the plane of actual reality into the plane of another life, a life he himself creates and imagines. Believing in this life, the actor can begin to create.

The stage is the truth in which the actor sincerely believes. And even a palpable lie must become a truth in the theatre if it is to become art. For this it is necessary for the actor strongly to develop his imagination, a childlike naïveté and trustfulness, artistic perception of truth and of the truthful in his soul and body. All these qualities help him to turn a coarse stage lie into the most delicate truth of his relation to the life he imagines. Let us agree to call all these qualities the *feeling of truth.* Therein is the play of imagination and the fostering of creative faith; therein is a barrier against stage lies; therein is the feeling of moderation; therein is the earnest of childlike naïveté and sincerity of artistic emotion. The feeling of truth, like concentration and freedom from strain, can be both developed and practised. But this is neither the time nor the place to speak of the methods and means of such work. I shall only say now that this ability to feel the truth must be developed to such an extent that absolutely nothing would take place on the stage, nothing would be said and nothing heard without being first filtered by the artistic feeling of truth.

When I discovered this well-known truth, I placed all my scenic exercises in relaxing muscles as well as in concentration under the control of the feeling of truth. Only now, with the aid of this feeling, did I succeed in achieving real, natural and not forcible relaxation of muscles and concentration on the stage.

In the process of my observations and casual intuitive discoveries I grasped, i.e., felt with all my artistic being, many other truths that I had long known (though not on the stage). Taken together, they helped me to promote that excellent artistic feeling I have called *creative mood* in contradistinction to the other, poor feeling–*actor's mood* which I was fighting against.

By this period of my artistic life we, i.e., Vladimir Ivanovich and I, the two leading workers of the theatre, had become full-fledged stage directors of different types. It was only natural that each of us wanted to, and could, progress only along his own independent line, simultaneously remaining faithful to the principles of our art.

In the past we both sat at the same table, working on the same play. Now each of us had his own table, his own play, his own production. It was neither disagreement over basic principles nor a rift. It was a quite natural phenomenon: to succeed, each artist must eventually come to the path on to which he is pushed by his nature and talent.

When we started working independently, both of us were mature artistically, and this enabled us to make the most of our abilities.

I should like to note that it was at this time that Nemirovich-Danchenko scored his greatest hits as a stage director with his excellent versions of Dostoyevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers* and *The Demons,* which revealed both his literary acumen and his ability to direct actors along proper channels. His production *The Karamazov Brothers* was especially splendid and daring. Here, outer effects and scenery were reduced to the minimum, and attention was focussed mainly on acting. Some of the actors proved quite a revelation. Leonid Leonidov in the rôle of Dmitry Karamazov showed that he was a dramatic actor of tremendous temperament. The monumental play (divided in two parts, shown on successive evenings) was so suspenseful and thrilling, it created the presentiment of some new, looming Russian tragedy.

As for myself, I continued along my own path–a path full of doubts–in search of new forms of art.

"THE DRAMA OF LIFE"

IT WAS IN KNUT HAMSUN'S *The Drama of Life* that I first experimented with the methods of inner technique I had discovered in the course of my search for new ways of promoting the creative mood.

I shall try to describe this significant moment of my life.

In *The Drama of Life* everything is unreal. It seems that the author himself looks at everything with the eyes of his hero, the talented Kareno, philosopher and thinker, who is living through the climactic moment of his creative life. The play has no shadows or half-tones; its colours are the basic colours of the spiritual palette. Each of the characters embodies one of the human passions which he portrays all through the play; the miser is miserly all the time, the dreamer dreams, the lover loves, etc. It is a picture of straight stripes of various colours–green, yellow, red, etc.

I played Kareno, the character symbolizing a dream, an idea. Teresita, who loves him and in whom the Red Rooster has begun to sing–i.e., in whom the blood has spoken–embodies womanly passion and burns with love for the hero. In a fit of passion she madly plays on the piano and in an attack of jealousy puts out the beacon in the lighthouse in order to sink the ship in which her rival, Kareno's wife, is travelling. In the meantime, the limping postman, a Quasimodo-like freak, covets Teresita. Teresita's father only thinks of squeezing as much profit as possible from his estate, until finally his avariciousness drives him to insanity. At the most crucial moment of the play there appears a mysterious and ominous figure with a hand stretched out for alms–the beggar Thy, called "Justice."

Each of the characters moves fatally along the path of his passions to his human or superhuman goal, and perishes without reaching it.

The play opens with Kareno writing the most difficult chapter of his book about justice, and for this purpose a glass tower is being built for him as near the sky as possible, for that chapter cannot be written on earth. Kareno's spiritual urge for greater heights struggles with human passions and desires. He is prevented from realizing the dreams nurturing in the glass tower. People set fire to it, it is destroyed and with it the creation of the genius who dared dream of the divine on earth.

Around this tragedy of the human soul swirls earthly life with its calamities. A cholera epidemic is raging at a fair amidst the stores filled with goods, amidst the buyers and the tradesmen–and this epidemic leaves the impress of a nightmare. The white tents of the tradesmen are a fine screen for moving, ghostlike silhouettes. These silhouettes are of the tradesmen measuring cloth and of the buyers, some standing motionlessly, others moving in an unending stream. The tents are placed on platforms rising from the proscenium to the backstage, and this gives the impression that the entire place is filled with shadows. Similar shadows fill a carousel, flying high into the air and descending precipitously to the ground. The hellish music of a hand organ seems to pursue them. On the proscenium some people whirl madly, desperately in a dance, only to fall dead–victims of cholera.

In this nightmare, in this emotional chaos, the ghostly musicians, the northern lights in the wintry sky, the thunder of the underground hammer blows in the quarry where giant-looking workers cut marble for the miser, appear as evil omens. Tired to the point of exhaustion, these workers come out with pickaxes and shovels, posing in front of a long stone wall, like a bas-relief by Meunier.[55] These bas-relief-like scenes were quite a fad then, an original artistic conventionality.

The scenery conformed to the general plan of the production and was painted in large, sharply delineated planes and stripes of primary colours–the hills were very hilly, the tree trunks very perpendicular, the river flowing in the distance very straight.

The various touches of the production–directorial (mine and L. A. Sulerzhitsky's), decorative (V. Y. Yegorov's and, in the third act, N. P. Ulyanov's) and musical (I. A. Sats's)–were in the spirit of the then existing extreme Leftist tendency in the theatre, giving the play a sharpness unknown before that time.

The play was a big success and that was all the more important since we were among the pioneers breaking the path to a Leftist trend. But as a rule innovators' achievements are not recognized at first. Others appear, borrow the discoveries made before them, and present them in popular form. This is exactly what happened to us.

The success of the production was rather scandalous. Half of the audience, those of the Left, applauded resolutely and furiously:

"Death to realism! Down with crickets and mosquitoes! (A hint at the sound effects in Chekhov's plays.) Long live the progressive theatre! Long live the Left!"

The other half—the conservative, the Right—hissed and shouted:

"Shame on the Art Theatre! Down with the decadents! Long live the old theatre!"

And what did the actors do in this play? What did they achieve? I shall answer for myself, without touching my colleagues.

I hid behind the other co-creators of the production, i.e., behind the directors, artists, composer, etc., being thankful that the spectators have no idea of what each co-creator of a production is responsible for.

In our profession it often happens that the mood created by the scenery is often ascribed to acting; the original costumes and make-up are written down as created by the actors; the beautiful musical accompaniment, composed to gloss over monotonous lines, is written down as a new method of expressing emotion in words. How many stage productions there are in which actors hide behind the stage director, artist and musician! How often the background conceals the most important thing in the theatre—the acting of the players!

But the audience, meeting the actor face to face during the performance, applauds or criticizes only him, completely forgetting about the other co-creators who hide in the wings.

This time the same thing happened. The spectators applauded and hissed us actors and forgot the others. The impression was one that the actors had scored a success. But I had become extremely strict towards myself, was not afraid to dig into the roots of the reasons of such phenomena, and therefore remained sceptical towards the success and the results of the production. I regarded the success as one of a negative character since my laboratory work and the newly confirmed foundations of inner technique had been completely compromised in my own eyes.

An analysis of what had happened gave good reason for despair. The thing is that in my work on *The Drama of Life* I followed the principles of inner technique which I had tested in the process of my laboratory work. On the basis of this I focussed all my attention on the inner content of the play. And in order that nothing might stand in its way, I did away with all the outer means of embodiment—gestures, movements and changes of poses—because at that time they seemed to be too bodily, realistic and material, and what I needed was unembodied passion in all its purity and nakedness, passion that was naturally born in the soul of the actor. I thought then that for its interpretation the actor needed only his face, eyes and mimetics. Let him live this passion not with the aid of movements and gestures, but with that of emotions and temperament. In my enthusiasm for the new methods of inner technique I sincerely believed that all the actor had to do to convey his emotions was to become master of the life-saving *creative mood;* the rest, I thought, would come of itself.

Imagine my surprise when things turned out exactly the other way round. Never had the actor's, and not creative, mood gripped me as strongly as it did in this play. What had happened?

I had thought that if I did not gesticulate I would appear incorporeal and that this would help me to devote all my energy and attention to the inner content of the rôle. In reality it turned out that this inwardly unjustified violence against gestures and the focussing of attention on the inner content of the rôle had brought about a tremendous strain and petrification of the body and soul. The consequences were self-evident: violation of nature, as usual, frightened emotion and replaced it by ordinary theatrical stencils, actor's mood and trade tricks. I tried to squeeze a false passion, temperament and inspiration out of myself, but all that I succeeded in doing was to strain my muscles, throat and respiration. I applied this violation of artistic nature not only to myself, but to others too, and the consequences were quite anecdotal. At one of the rehearsals I saw the following scene. The tragedian, perspiring profusely, was lying on the floor and roaring in an attempt to squeeze passion out of himself, while one of my assistants was sitting on top of him and shouting at the top of his voice:

"More, more! Give more of it! Make it stronger!"

Shortly before that I had scolded a director for treating his actors as one would treat a horse that refused to draw a cart.

"More, more! Make it stronger!" the director would goad. "Live the thing! Feel it!"

It turned out that my much-lauded methods were not a whit better than those for which I criticized others. And yet, I thought it was all very simple: naked passion and nothing else.

But in art the simpler the task, the harder; the simple must have content, without that it loses all meaning. To become the main, the simple must embody the entire cycle of complex phenomena of life, and that requires real talent, perfect technique, a wealth of imagination, for there is nothing more boring than the simplicity of poor imagination.

That is why the simple, naked expression of passion without the aid of any theatrical conventionalities turned out to be an extremely difficult task that could be entrusted only to a polished actor. Little wonder that it was beyond our power!

My mood after *The Drama of Life* was at the lowest possible ebb. It seemed that all the laboratory work I had done in my search for new art forms was fruitless, that I had come to another blind alley from which there was no way out. There were days, and even months, of heart-rending doubts before I grasped the well-known truth that in our profession everything must be turned into a *habit*, which makes the new one's own, organic, a second nature. Only after that can one use the new without thinking of its mechanism. This applied to the case in point: the *creative mood* could save an actor only when it was a normal and natural phenomenon with him. Without that he would unconsciously copy the outer form of the Leftist trend without inwardly justifying it.

From that moment I reduced my demands and decided to restrict myself to simpler problems in order to apply to them the discoveries I had made in my laboratory work.

ILYA SATS AND LEOPOLD SULERZHITSKY

THE DRAMA OF LIFE also marked the début in our theatre of two exceptionally gifted men, who were fated to play an important role in our work. The first of these was Leopold Sulerzhitsky,[56] who had decided to become a stage director and wanted to learn at my side. The other was the musician and composer Ilya Sats, who came to the Moscow Art Theatre from the Studio on Povarskaya.

I think that Sats was the first man in the history of the theatre to show an example of how music for drama should be written. Before beginning his work, Sats would attend all the rehearsals, taking a stage director's interest in studying the play and working out the production plan. Initiated into all the nuances of our work, he understood and felt no worse than we in what place in the play and why his music was necessary—that is, the stage director in the general mood of the play or the actor who lacked certain elements for the interpretation of certain parts of his rôle, or for the sake of displaying the fundamental idea of the play. Then he included the quintessence of the rehearsal work in his musical theme and the chords that were the chief material of his future composition. He wrote the music at the very last moment, when it was no longer possible to wait for its completion. The process of writing it took the following form. He would ask his family to lock him up in one of the remotest rooms of his apartment and not to let him out until he had completed the composition. His desire was sacred to all and the door would be opened only three or four times a day so that food could be brought to him. For several days and nights sad and solemn melodies and chords would be heard coming from the room of the voluntary prisoner, or one would hear his humorously affected declamation, from which he apparently approached the musical theme. Then for days it would be deadly still, and his family would think that he was weeping, that something had happened to him, but they would be afraid to knock at the door, for any contact with the outer world at such moments threatened to kill all desire to create in Sats. He showed the finished work to me and Sulerzhitsky, who was an accomplished musician. Then, after the orchestration was completed, he would rehearse with the musicians and play the music for us again. This was followed by a long operation that must have been unbearable for the composer, during which we cut out all that was unnecessary for the drama in his music. After this Sats would lock himself in again and rewrite his music. Then he would rehearse with the musicians again, and would be subjected to a new operation, until at last we got what we wanted. This is why his music was always part and parcel of the production. It might have been more successful or less successful than the music of other composers, but it was always different from theirs. The music of *The Drama of Life* was one of the chief glories of the production.

The other important figure that appeared on the theatrical horizon during the production of *The Drama of Life* was my friend and comrade, Leopold

Antonovich Sulerzhitsky, or as we all called him "dear Suler." This remarkable man of exceptional talent played a large part in our theatre and in my artistic life.

Imagine a little man with short legs, of powerful physical build and unusual strength, with a handsome, enthusiastic and always lively face, clear, laughing eyes, delicate lips, a moustache and a beard *à la* Henri IV.

The altogether exceptional temperament of Sulerzhitsky brought life and enthusiasm into every enterprise he undertook. His talents displayed themselves in all fields: painting, music, singing and literature. His was a life of adventure–a fisherman in the Crimea, a sailor who had made several voyages around the world, a painter, a farm-hand, a tramp, a revolutionary party functionary, a fiery Tolstoian, and a very close friend of the great writer for whom he copied manuscripts. When the time came for him to do his military service, he refused to become a soldier. For this he was tried and sentenced to solitary confinement, then closed up in a lunatic asylum and finally exiled to the remote fortress of Kushka. When he returned from exile, Tolstoi entrusted him with the leadership of a large party of Dukhobors who were emigrating from the Caucasus to Canada. The trip was full of adventure and danger, but Sulerzhitsky fulfilled the difficult task he was entrusted with. In Canada, Sulerzhitsky lived for two years and helped the Dukhobors to settle down. He also acted as their attorney in their relations with the American authorities. In Canada he lived all through the winter in a tent, and that undermined his health. When he returned to Moscow, Sulerzhitsky was altogether penniless, lived secretly in the hut of a railway watchman because he had been forbidden to live in Moscow, and often slept on the boulevards.

He came to our theatre and soon became one of us. He did not have any definite work, but he was always doing something for the theatre: if it was necessary to move or paint scenery he was there to help; if it was necessary to make props, sew costumes, rehearse for someone, go over a rôle with someone, or prompt, Sulerzhitsky was always on the spot.

When he married he dropped his wandering life and joined our theatre as my assistant on *The Drama of Life* production. I shall describe his activity later on.

BLACK VELVET

ALTHOUGH DISAPPOINTED in the methods of stage production, I had to work in this field repeatedly, and did it quite enthusiastically. There was, for instance, the production of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird,* which made complex technical demands on the theatre. Before beginning with my experiments and search, I re-examined and re-assessed for the hundredth time the advantages and disadvantages of the production means at our disposal, the shortcomings of our stage mechanism and of the architecture of our theatre, etc. And then I said:

The artist paints his sketches in oils; all his tones and lines harmonize. The deep azure of the sky, the light tone of greenery with vague outlines of foliage that seem to blend with the boughs of the nearest trees, the sunlit tree-tops, which appear to melt away in the air—all this adds to the charm of the sketch. It is painted on canvas or on paper, which have two dimensions only, length and width, but on the stage there are three dimensions, for the stage has a depth with many planes which are expressed only in perspective on the smooth surface of the artist's sketch. When the artist's sketch is transferred to the stage, it is necessary to force this third dimension—that is, depth—upon it. No sketch, especially one of a landscape character, can stand this operation. The smooth, even azure sky of the sketch is divided into five or more sections on the stage. The cut parts of the sky hang in rows, from the forestage to the backdrop, each placed according to mathematically measured plans, reminding one of towels painted blue and hung out to dry. In theatrical parlance these are called flies.

And oh, what heavenly theatrical flies they are! Notwithstanding their seeming etherealness and transparency, they cut off the tops of church towers, trees, roofs, houses, if these are carelessly placed behind the flies and their heavenly azure. Each of the flies hangs opposite a long metal box with many electric bulbs. One batten burns more brightly, another less, the azure tone of each of the flies naturally changes, does not blend with the tones of the other flies and is clearly distinguishable from them. This breaks up the unity of the theatrical sky. Artists exercise all of their ingenuity to do away with the blue towels of the flies. For instance, they throw branches with leaves across the whole width of the stage. The result is a series of arboreal arches which hang in rows on every plane of the stage. The flies, instead of being azure in colour, become green. But they still remain where they are.

The sketch of the artist has no flies, cardboard bushes or earthen mounds and ditches. But on the stage, with its three dimensions, they cannot be avoided. The wings and the cardboard bushes are cut out, so to say, one by one, from the sketch, and placed on the stage as separate and independent entities. For instance, the sketch has a tree and behind it a corner of a house in perspective, followed by hayricks. It becomes necessary to separate them from each other and to manufacture several flats which are placed one behind the other on the stage, one made to resemble the tree, the other the corner of the house, the third the hayricks. Or you see trees and bushes on the sketch. It is hard to see where the tree ends and the bush begins. The softness of gradation is as charming in the sketch as it is in nature. But on the stage it is altogether different. The theatrical flat, torn away from the sketch and having become an independent part of the scenery, has its own sharp and definite outline of cardboard or wood. The coarseness of the wooden contours of foliage is a bad and typical characteristic of the theatrical flat. The charming delicacy of the artist's sketch is invariably spoiled on the stage.

But there is an even greater evil. The third dimension, that is, the depth of the stage and the scenery, places the artist face to face with the terrible floor of the stage. What can one do with the tremendous, smooth and dirty surface? Can one make it uneven by building platforms and traps? But do you know what it means to build a whole floor during a short intermission? Think how much longer it makes the performance. But let us grant that it has been done. How is one to hide the mathematically placed planes of the stage with their straight lines of wings and cardboard or wooden flats? One must have great ingenuity and a thorough knowledge of the stage in order to wrestle with such obstacles and to hide them both in the sketch and on the stage.

But there are yet other hardships. The artist's sketch is done in bright, living oils, or in tender water-colours, or in *gouache,* while scenery is done in bad glue paint and the man for whom it is done always demands that there should be as much glue as possible in the paint, for otherwise it will peel from the scenery and lose its freshness and newness, and the dust from it is poisonous for the lungs and the throat. But when there is too much glue, the paints look dirty.

All these conditions make it often very hard to recognize the artist's sketch in the completed scenery. And no matter what the artist may do, he is never able to conquer materiality and coarseness in stage scenery.

The scenery, like the theatre, is a convention, and cannot be anything else.

But does it mean that the more there is of this convention, the better it is? And are all conventions good and permissible? There are good and bad conventions. Good conventions are even welcome in certain cases; the bad ones should be eliminated.

Good theatricality is a convention; it is *scenism* in its best sense. All that helps the acting and production is scenic. The chief aim is to achieve the fundamental goal of creativeness. Therefore, the convention that helps the actor and the production to *recreate the life of the human spirit of the play and its characters* is good and scenic. This life must be convincing. It is impossible amidst palpable lies and deception. On the stage the lie must become, or seem to be, the truth in order to be convincing. The truth on the stage is something in which the actor, the artist and the spectator sincerely believe. Therefore, in order to be accepted as such, convention should be truthlike, and should be believed in by the actor and the spectator.

Good convention should be beautiful. But the beautiful is not that which theatrically blinds and amazes the spectator. The beautiful is that which uplifts the life of the human spirit, that is, emotions and thoughts of the actors and the spectators.

Stage direction and acting may be realistic, conventionalized, modernistic, impressionistic, futuristic–it is all the same so long as they are convincing, that is, truthful or truthlike; beautiful, that is, artistic; uplifted, and reproducing the true life of the human spirit without which there can be no art.

Convention which does not fulfil these requirements is bad convention.

Wings, the stage floor, cardboard, glue paint, scenic planes in the majority of cases help to create bad, unconvincing, false and ugly scenic convention, which interferes with the recreation of the life of the human spirit on the stage and turns the temple of the theatre into a Punch-and-Judy show.

All these bad theatrical conventions of scenery spoil the artist's sketch, which is also conventional, but conventional in the good scenic sense of the word.

Places of amusement may be satisfied with bad theatricality. In a real theatre bad theatrical conventions should be abolished once and for all.

Of late the cult of theatrical convention without distinction of quality is considered fashionable and in good taste. Theatrical convention, both in acting and in the production of plays, is regarded as something nice and naïve. People who create only with the mind, pretend naïvely to believe in what they call their childlike naturalness.

Losing faith in the theatrical means of production and declaring war on bad theatricality, I turned to good theatrical convention, hoping it would take the place of the bad convention that I hated. In other words, I needed new principles of production for our future work.

It was with these general demands in mind that I set out on a new search for outer theatrical forms. It seemed then that all stage means and methods of production, discovered or invented by that time, had already been used to the full. Where was I to look for new ones? Was I to set up a special studio for research in scenery? I had no money for that, for I was still up to my eyes in debt after the Society of Art and Literature and the Studio on Povarskaya. Instead of a permanent studio, we were forced to make use of a temporary, mobile work-room. We decided to do as follows: to invite those interested in questions of production to my house on a certain day, and to have all sorts of material ready for us to work on, i.e., paper, cardboard, paint, pencils, drawings, books, paintings, sketches, clay for modelling, pieces and samples of materials of variegated colours, tones and textures. Each one was to try to express in one model form or another what he was dreaming of–a trap in the stage, new architecture for the theatre, a new principle of scenery or of its component parts, a costume, or an original combination of colours, a simple theatrical trick perhaps, a new scenic possibility, or a method and style for a new production.

There were very few enthusiasts at the first meeting: only my friend Sulerzhitsky, the artist Yegorov, who was working for the theatre, the actor Georgy Burdzhalov, who was a technician by profession, and I. We all appeared at the appointed time completely unarmed–without any creative idea, without any definite problem to solve, with demands of a general nature. We were all dissatisfied with the old, which had grown tiresome, but no one knew what to put in its place. At the beginning these conditions interfered with the proper development of our work. The hardest thing in creative work is to begin, i.e., to find a goal, a foundation, a ground, a principle or even a simple scenic piece of hokum, and to be enthused by it. Enthusiasm, however low, may stimulate creativeness. If there is none, one does not feel one is standing on firm ground. It is necessary to squeeze creative thoughts and feelings out of oneself, so one paces the room, begins to do something but does not finish it, is disappointed and stops. We combined materials of various hues, drew the measurements of the stage and the floor, tried to take advantage of some accident and use it as a starting point in the hope of finding an important scenic principle. Unwilling creators, we worked without spirit.

Then an accident occurred, and in our profession a happy accident is a great help. Certain production principles, which are the subject of lengthy newspaper and magazine articles and of lectures and which are considered almost the very basis of our art, are in reality nothing but the consequence of a simple accident. It was so in my case. I needed a piece of black velvet, but it had disappeared, although we had just seen it. We began to look for it, opening boxes and drawers, but could not find it. When we stopped at last we saw that the piece of black velvet was hanging in a most conspicuous place in the room. Why had we not seen it before? The answer was simple. Because a larger piece of black velvet was hanging on the wall directly behind it. Black was not seen against black. More than that, the piece of velvet covered the back of a chair and the chair became a tabouret. We did not understand at first where the back of the chair had disappeared and whence came the unfamiliar tabouret.

Eureka! We discovered a new principle. We had found a background which could conceal the depth of the stage and give it the appearance of having only two dimensions and not three, for the floor, the sides and the ceiling, covered with black velvet, would blend with the black background. As a result, the depth would disappear and the whole stage would be filled with blackness. On this background, like on a black piece of paper, one could draw white or coloured lines, spots, sketches which could exist independently in the vast space of the stage frame. To reduce this big stage, which draws the spectators' attention, to a small space, even to a spot that would attract the attention of a 1,000-strong audience—would that not be a discovery long sought for?

But to say the truth it seemed new only because it was very old and well forgotten by everybody. That black is not seen against black is no great news. It is the principle of every *camera obscura.* There is not a single panoptical room where men, furniture and things have not appeared and disappeared suddenly before the very eyes of the spectator. How did it ever happen that such a practical and convenient principle had not been used on the stage? And it is useful and necessary in the theatre, for instance, in the fantastics of *The Blue Bird,* which, because of inadequate technical facilities, we did not know how to produce.

We saw that the new principle could simplify many technical problems and metamorphoses in Maeterlinck's play, and once this was so, then our dream would be realized and we could produce *The Blue Bird,* which we had begun to love very much. The new discovery stimulated imagination and encouraged enlightenment.

Enlightenment does not come often, and it must be made use of whenever it does. I ran into my study to bring order into the thoughts and emotions that were aroused in me and to write down the things that I might forget when that moment of enlightenment passed. Columbus was probably less excited when he discovered America than I was at that time. I believed in the great importance of this discovery. I dreamed of all sorts of tricks I could perform with black velvet. In various places of the stage covered with black velvet, like on a huge piece of black paper–at the top, on the sides, at the bottom, it would be possible to show the faces or the entire figures of actors, and whole sets of scenery which could appear before the very eyes of the audience or disappear when a section of the black velvet was moved. It would be possible to make thin figures out of stout ones by sewing pieces of black velvet to the sides of the actors' costumes, thus seemingly cutting away all that was unnecessary. It would be possible painlessly to amputate legs and arms, hide the body, cut off the head, by simply covering the amputated parts with black velvet. . . .

After that our experiments assumed an altogether new direction. In a room hidden from the eyes of the curious we set up a large *camera obscura,* and there the original group of inventors made a series of endless experiments. We discovered many new scenic possibilities and effects. We thought we were great inventors, but alas, our hopes were greater than the results we accomplished. The disappearance of a set of scenery and its appearance in various parts of the stage—now on the left, now on the right, now at the top, now at the bottom—turned out to be a piece of hokum that had too much hokum about it. A trick like that could be used in some revue, but not in a serious play. When we saw the scenery of black velvet, and the entire portal of the stage turned into a gloomy, airless sarcophagal space, we seemed to sense the presence of death on the stage.

Isadora Duncan, who happened to be in the theatre at the moment, cried out in terror, *"C'est une maladie!"** and she was right.

"Well," we consoled ourselves, "we will carry our principle through in velvet of other colours."

Alas, this principle worked only with black velvet, which absorbs all rays of light, and thanks to this property kills the third dimension on the stage. Other shades of velvet do not accomplish this, and the third dimension thrives among them as it does in the midst of customary scenery.

But fate was kind to us. It sent us Leonid Andreyev's play, *The Life of Man.*

"This is where we need this background," I cried out, after reading the play.

"THE LIFE OF MAN"

LEONID ANDREYEV was an old friend of our theatre, since the days when he was a journalist and signed his theatrical reviews with the pseudonym "James Lynch." Later he became quite famous as a writer and dramatist, and often said he would like to see some play of his included in the theatre's repertoire. Now was the time when everything favoured the inclusion of his new play, *The Life of Man,* in our repertoire, though it was out of character with all our other plays.

There was an opinion prevailing at that time, an opinion which it was impossible to overthrow, that ours was a realistic theatre, that we were interested only in everyday life, and that we regarded all that was abstract and unreal uninteresting and unstageable.

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* It's nightmarish! (Fr.)

As Count Shabelsky in Chekhov's *Ivanov* (1918)

It was not so in reality. At the time of which I am writing, I was almost exclusively interested in works of an abstract nature and was seeking for ways and means of interpreting them on the stage. Andreyev's play was timely, for it answered all of our demands.[57] The manner of its outward performance was already found. I mean the black velvet, in which I was not yet disappointed at that time. True, I was sorry I would show the new scenic invention in *The Life of Man*, and not in *The Blue Bird*, for which it had been intended. But believing that the scope for the use of velvet would be much greater than it had proved to be in reality, I decided that the new principle could be applied to far more than one production. And the dark background fitted Andreyev's play very well. One could well speak of the eternal against such a background Andreyev's melancholy play, his pessimism, were in accord with the mood created by black velvet on the stage. The play depicted misery and gloom, an utter, horrible darkness.

Against such a background the terrible figure of the character Andreyev calls *Someone in Gray* seems even more ghostly than it is. It is there on the stage, and yet somehow it seems it is not. You feel the presence of someone whom you can hardly delineate and who gives the whole play a fatal shading. Into such darkness one must place the little life of man and give it the appearance of accidentality, ghostliness, evanescence. In Andreyev's play this life is not even life, but only the scheme of life, its general outline. The scenery made out of ropes helped to emphasize this idea. Like lines in a drawing, they marked the contours of a room, windows, doors, tables, chairs.

Imagine a huge piece of black paper with the scenery drawn on it in white lines. On the stage one felt an ominous and endless depth behind these lines.

It is natural that the people in this schematic room should not be people, but merely the schemes of people. Their costumes were also outlined. Some parts of their bodies were covered with black velvet which blended with the background and seemed not to exist at all. In this schematic life there is born a schematic man, who is welcomed by the schemes of his relatives, and friends. Their words express not living joy, but simply its formal report. These customary exclamations are uttered not by living voices but seemingly with the help of phonograph records. All this foolish, ghostlike life is born unexpectedly from the darkness of the background before the very eyes of the spectators and disappears just as unexpectedly in that darkness. People do not enter through doors and do not leave through them, they appear unexpectedly on the forestage and disappear in the darkness of the background.

The scenery of the second scene, that of the youth of Man and his wife, is done in livelier rosy lines. The actors also give more signs of life. The tempo of the love scenes and the bold challenge thrown by Man at Fate at times suggest something like ecstasy. But the life that had barely flared up in youth dies down in the third act, amidst the conventions of society. The large ballroom, which reflects the luxurious life and wealth of Man, is outlined by gilded rope. A ghostly orchestra with a phantom conductor, the melancholy music, the lifeless dance of two whirling females: and on the forestage before the footlights a row of deformities–old women, old millionaires, rich old maids, eligible bachelors and gaudily dressed ladies. The gloomy black and gold riches, the loud colours of the women's dresses, the gloomy black evening coats, the dull, self-satisfied, immovable faces. . . .

Scene from the first act of Chekhov's *Ivanov* (1904)

"How beautiful! How luxurious! How rich!" the guests exclaimed lifelessly. The result was a *grotesque,* which is such a fad today.

In the fourth scene the life which has hardly begun is already rolling downwards. The death of their only child undermines the strength of the aged couple. In a moment of despair they call on Someone in Gray, but he is expressively silent. The crazed father lunges at him with his fists, but the mysterious figure melts away in space, and the man and the woman remain with their sorrow, unaided by higher powers.

The last scene of the play, depicting the death of Man, who drinks himself into forgetfulness, is extremely nightmarish. Black Parcas in long cloaks, like rats with tails, crawling across the floor, their crone-like whispering, coughing and grumbling create horror and fearful premonitions. Then across the forestage flit single and massed figures of drunkards who disappear in the darkness. They growl drunkenly, gesticulate in despair, or remain in drunken immovability, like visions in a nightmare. For a moment their cries fill the darkness, and then die away, leaving behind unintelligible sighs. At the moment of Man's death, a multitude of gigantic human figures that reach to the ceiling spring up from nowhere; there is a bacchanalia of flying and creeping deformities, which symbolizes death agony. Then there is a last terrible, ringing blow which pierces to the very marrow of the bones, and the life of Man is ended. All disappears, Man himself, the shadows, the drunken nightmare. Only in the bottomless and endless darkness there again rises the tremendous figure of Someone in Gray, who pronounces in a fateful, steely and irresistible voice, once and forever, death sentence on mankind.

We were able to achieve all these effects with the help of black velvet, which played an important part in the production. The play was very successful. Our theatre, it was said, had discovered new paths in art. These paths, contrary to our desire, did not go any farther than the scenery, which diverted my attention from acting, and because of that we did not add anything new to our art. Having severed ourselves from realism, we actors felt powerless and somewhat lost. In order not to hang in mid air, we naturally resorted to what we had mechanically become accustomed to, i.e., to our usual method of acting which, for some unknown reason, is regarded by the audience as "the lofty style" of stage performance.

Notwithstanding the success of the production, I was not satisfied with the result, for I understood perfectly well that it had brought nothing new to our art.

A VISIT TO MAETERLINCK

WE WERE PREPARING to stage *The Blue Bird* which Maeterlinck had entrusted to us. The Belgian poet's play was to have its *première* in Moscow, at our Moscow Art Theatre. It was quite a responsibility and I considered it my duty to have a talk with the author. In the summer I decided to go to see him, for he had sent me a very kind invitation to visit him.[58] At that time he lived about six hours by rail from Paris, at the former St.-Vandrille Abbey (Normandy), which he had just bought.

I started in proper Russian style: with a great amount of gifts, candy, and other baggage with me. I was quite worried when I got into the railway carriage. I was going to visit a famous writer, a philosopher, and it was necessary to prepare a clever phrase for our first meeting. I did invent something, and I confess that I wrote down the pompous result of my ingenuity on my cuff.

The train finally reached my destination. I got off. There was not a single porter on the platform. Outside there were several automobiles, the chauffeurs crowded near the little entrance gate. Weighed down with a mass of packages, which were falling out of my hands, I approached the gate. Someone asked me to show my ticket. While I was rummaging in my pockets, I dropped all my packages. At this critical moment one of the chauffeurs called me:

"Monsieur Stanislavsky?"

An elderly, clean-shaven chauffeur, gray, handsome, dressed in a gray coat and a chauffeur's cap, helped me to gather my belongings. My coat fell. He picked it up and threw it carefully over his arm. Then he led me to an automobile, sat down at the wheel and invited me to sit next to him. The chauffeur made his way with unbelievable skill and speed among the children and poultry of the village street. I had no chance of admiring the beautiful Norman landscape, for we were going too fast. At one of the turns near a protruding rock we almost crashed head-on into a carriage, but the chauffeur skilfully managed to avoid hitting the horse. We began to chat about the car and the danger of speeding. Finally, I asked him how Monsieur Maeterlinck was getting along.

"Maeterlinck?" he exclaimed in surprise. "I'm Maeterlinck!"

I threw up my hands and then for a long time both of us loudly laughed. Thus, I never made use of the pompous phrase I had so carefully prepared. And it was all for the better, for the simple and unexpected manner of our meeting had brought us quickly close to each other.

We approached the estate, which was situated in a dense forest and had tremendous monastic gates. The ancient gates creaked, and the automobile, which seemed an anachronism in these medieval surroundings, entered the abbey grounds. No matter where one turned, one saw the remnants of several centuries of a life that had already disappeared. Some of the buildings were in ruins, others were still intact. We drove up to the refectory. I was led into a tremendous hall filled with sculptures, a hall with arches, columns and a great stairway. Here we were greeted by Mme. Georgette Maeterlinck-Leblanc, a very pleasant hostess and a very clever and interesting conversationalist, who was at the time dressed in a Norman robe.

Downstairs were the dining- and sitting-rooms. If one went up the stairway one saw a long corridor where the cells of the monks used to be in the old days. They had been turned into bedrooms, Maeterlinck's study, his wife's study, the secretary's room, the servants' quarters. Here the family lived. Then, passing a series of libraries, chapels and halls, one entered a large room with a wonderful old-fashioned verandah. Here in the shade, Maeterlinck worked in the day-time.

My room was on the other side, in a round tower that was once upon a time the chamber of an archbishop. I cannot forget the nights I spent there. The mysterious noises of the sleeping monastery, vague crumblings, exclamations, shrieks imagined in the night, the tower clock, the footsteps of the watchman–all this seemed to be bound up with Maeterlinck himself. So far as his private life is concerned I must lower the curtain, for it would be very immodest to describe something that was opened for me only by happy accident. I can only say that Maurice Maeterlinck was a charming, kind and merry host and companion. For days we spoke of art, and he was very glad to see an actor entering so deeply into the very being, meaning and analytical study of his craft. He was especially interested in the inner technique of the actor.

The first days were spent in conversations of a general nature. We walked a great deal. Maeterlinck always carried a .22 gun with him. He fished in a little brook. He told me about the past of the abbey, being quite versed in what had taken place there in the course of many centuries. After dinner, preceded by candelabra we would roam about the halls and corridors of the abbey. Our resounding steps on the stone flags, the antiquity about us, the gleaming candles, the mysterious atmosphere created an unusual mood.

In the far-off sitting-room we drank coffee and talked. His dog would scratch at the door. He would let it in, saying that Jacquot had come back from his café in the neighbouring village where he was having a little romance. At a stated hour, it returned to its master. The dog would leap to his knees and a charming conversation would begin between them. It seemed to me that the dog understood him. Jacquot was the prototype of the Dog in *The Blue Bird,* and so I made friends with it.

To end these running reminiscences of the wonderful days I passed with Maeterlinck and his wife, let me say a few words of how Maeterlinck regarded our production plan for his fairy-tale. At the beginning we spoke a great deal about the play itself, of the characteristics of the parts, of what Maeterlinck himself wanted in the play. And here he expressed himself definitely. But when our discussion reached the problems of the stage direction, he could not imagine how the thing could be done on the stage. I was forced to explain the whole thing to him in images and to show him some of my ideas. I played all the parts for him and he grasped my hints easily. Like Chekhov, Maeterlinck was not severe in his demands. He was easily carried away by what he liked, and his imagination willingly travelled in the directions I suggested.

In the day-time, when he was working, Mme. Maeterlinck and I would dream of producing *Aglavaine and Sélysette* and *Pelléas and Mélisandre* in natural surroundings.

There were many picturesque spots in the abbey grounds, as if purposely prepared for Maeterlinck's plays: a medieval well amidst greenery for the scene of the rendez-vous between Mélisandre and Pelléas, an underground cave for Pelléas' and Golo's scene. We decided to stage the show in the course of which the spectators and the actors would proceed from one place to another for each of the scenes. Later on, if I am not mistaken, Mme. Maeterlinck realized our dream by producing the play.

The time came to part. Maeterlinck promised to come to Moscow for the *première* of *The Blue Bird.* Unfortunately for all of us, he was unable to do so.

I shall not describe the production, which is well known not only in Russia, but also in Paris[39] where Sulerzhitsky used our *mises-en-scène* to stage it, accompanied by his young pupil Yevgeny Vakhtangov and artist Yegorov, whose sketches were used for the scenery and costumes. The charming music was composed by Ilya Sats.

Is it necessary to repeat that the play was very popular both in my country and in Paris?

"A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY"

TURGENEV'S *A Month in the Country* is an intricate love story. The heroine of the play, Natalia Petrovna, has spent all her life in a luxurious sitting-room, amidst all the conventionalities of the epoch, far from nature. There is the eternal triangle that creates chaos in her soul. The constant company of her husband, whom she does not love, and of Rakitin, to whom she does not dare give herself, friendship between her husband and Rakitin, the delicacy of their feelings for her—all this makes her life unbearable.

Turgenev contrasts this trio of hot-house plants to Verochka and the student Belayev. If in the former case love is of a hot-house variety, here it is natural, naïve and simple. Watching the lovers, and attracted by the simplicity of their relations, Natalia Petrovna hears the call of nature and yearns for simple, natural love. The hot-house rose wants to become a wild flower, she dreams of fields and forests. This leads to a general catastrophe. Natalia Petrovna falls in love with Belayev, frightens away poor Verochka with her simple and natural love, turns the student's head, but does not go away with him, loses her faithful admirer Rakitin, and remains for ever with her husband, whom she respects but does not love. And again she immures herself in her stuffy little sitting-room.

Like in *The Drama of Life* the lacework of the psychology of love which Turgenev weaves in such a masterly fashion demands a special kind of acting, which would allow the spectator to admire the peculiar design of the psychology of loving, suffering, jealous male and female hearts. Ordinary acting methods made Turgenev's plays unscenic, and, in fact, they had been regarded as such in the old theatre.

How was the actor to show to the spectator what was going on in his heart? It was a difficult stage task that could not be solved by gestures, movements or any of the accepted methods of performance. One needed some sort of unseen radiation of creative will and emotion; one needed eyes, mimetics, hardly palpable intonations of the voice, psychological pauses. Besides, it was necessary to do away with all that might hinder the spectator from grasping the inner essence of the feelings and thoughts of the characters.

Konstantin Stanislavsky as Rakitin and Olga Knipper as Natalia Petrovna in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* (1909)

For this it was necessary again to take advantage of immovability and do away with gestures and unnecessary movements on the stage, and to eliminate all of the director's *mises-en-scène.* Let the actors sit motionlessly, let them feel, speak, and impress the spectator by their acting. Let there be only a bench or a sofa on the stage, and let all the characters sit on it so as to display the inner essence and the intricate pattern of Turgenev's spiritual lacework.

Notwithstanding the failure of an analogous experiment in *The Drama of Life,* I decided to repeat it again, hoping that in *A Month in the Country* I would deal with ordinary, well-known human feelings, whereas in *The Drama of Life* I had to portray over-exaggerated human passion without resorting to gestures. The powerful passions of the Hamsun play seemed to me more difficult to portray without gestures than the intricate spiritual picture of the Turgenev comedy. Stanislavsky the actor, who played the part of Rakitin, knew only too well how difficult was the problem set him by Stanislavsky the stage director. Once again I put myself entirely in the hands of the actor, refusing the help of the stage director.

At least, I thought, we would find out if there were any true artistes in our company. At least we would see in practice whether it was true that the actor was the No. 1 figure and No. 1 creator on the stage.

The most important thing in *A Month in the Country* is the inner picture which it is necessary for the actor to understand in order to convey it to the audience. Without this picture there would be no need for Turgenev's play and no need to go to the theatre to see it, for the outward action of the characters, especially in our production, is reduced to the minimum. Moreover, to sit all through the play motionlessly, in one pose, the actor has to justify his right to do so in the eyes of 1,000 spectators who come to the theatre to *see*. This right is ensured him only by inner action, by spiritual activity determined by the psychological picture of the rôle.

In *A Month in the Country* this picture is drawn excellently by Turgenev and it was quite easy to decipher it, despite the complex psychology of the characters. In this respect the Russian author's play differed sharply from that of his Norwegian colleague. In *The Drama of Life* the inner picture is not painted in detail; it is given in broad general lines. In that play one has to give a *general* picture of avarice, a *general* picture of a dream, a *general* picture of passion. And in our profession there is nothing more dangerous than giving *general portrayals*. They lead to vague spiritual contours and deprive actors of their footing, of their self-confidence.

In our art the actor must understand what is demanded of him, what he himself wants, what is likely to stimulate his imagination. The inner content of a rôle is made up, as far as the actor is concerned, of numberless fascinating elements. We succeeded, and rather easily, in presenting clearly the inner content of the play; in this Turgenev himself helped us.

The portrayal of this picture and of the inner content of the rôle required concentration, and this diverted my attention from the auditorium and gave me the right to sit motionlessly in one place all through the play. Thus, what I failed to achieve in *The Drama of Life* in portraying strong human passions, I succeeded in this subtle comedy.

The play, and I (in the rôle of Rakitin), scored a very big success.[60] For the first time people noticed and properly assessed the results of my strenuous laboratory work which enabled me to create a new, unusual tone and manner of acting which distinguished me from other actors. I was happy and satisfied not so much because I had personally scored as an actor as because my new method had finally been recognized.

The main result of the production was that it directed my attention to the methods of studying and analyzing both the rôle and my mood when playing it. It helped me to grasp another well-known truth—that the actor should know how to work not only on himself, but on the rôle too. I had known that before, of course, but somewhat superficially. That is a sphere that requires a thorough study, a technique all its own, its own methods, exercises and system.

The study of this aspect of our art was a "new passion of Stanislavsky's."

But in this production, quite against my intentions, I had to interest myself in the outer, scenic side of our collective art. This was due to the talent of the new artists with whom I had to work.

I may recall that the more I became disappointed in the means of theatrical production and the deeper I studied the inner creative work of the actor—as talented actors matured and our troupe grew into a first-class company—the less attention I paid to the outward side of my productions. Meanwhile, other Moscow and Petersburg theatres were displaying more and more interest in outward appearances, even to the detriment of the inner content of the play. The result was that we, who were among the first in the 1890's to bring great painters like Korovin, Levitan (in the Society of Art and Literature) and Simov into the theatre, surrendered our palm in this sphere to others. In the imperial theatres of Moscow and Petersburg, scenery was in the hands of painters with great names—Korovin, Golovin, and others. Painters had become not only desirable, but necessary members of the theatrical family; the spectators had grown more and more exacting in their tastes. But where were we to find a painter who could answer all our needs? It was not with all, by a long way, that we could talk about the essence of our art. Not all of them had the necessary acumen to grasp the ideas in a play, of literature generally, of psychology, of stage art. Many painters still ignore these fundamental problems of ours. They go to the theatre either for material reasons or for their own artistic purposes. For them the proscenium arch is a large frame for their picture, and the theatre is an art gallery where they can daily show their work to thousands of people. Painters are attracted by the popularity of the theatre. Indeed, art exhibitions are visited only by hundreds of people and that in the brief period that they are open. The theatre, on the other hand, is visited by thousands, day after day, month after month. It was only natural that the painters saw this advantage.

At first, when painters worked in the opera and ballet, the theatre made no great demands of a special character on them. They were absolutely independent and created separately from the actors, often showing them the scenery only at the *première*. It sometimes happened that, without asking for permission, the painter would change the plan of the model. The result was that the actors and the stage director would unexpectedly find themselves in an impasse literally on the very eve of the *première* and would have to hurriedly change the *mises-en-scène* which they had long rehearsed. Could we give the painters the same independence in the drama theatre?

Our theatre presented the painter with a series of demands of a specific character. To a certain extent he was required to be a stage director too. One of the first, and one of the few, well-known painter-directors in those days was Victor Simov. For a long time there were no others and we were compelled to turn to young artists who, though talented, were often inexperienced.

During one of our trips to Petersburg we became acquainted with A. N. Benois and his circle, the sponsors of "The World of Art" exhibitions which at that time were considered progressive.[61] Benois was thoroughly versed in all spheres of art and knowledge and we thought it wonderful indeed how much information one human mind and memory could retain. He enriched his friends with his tremendous knowledge, answering their questions as if he were a walking encyclopaedia. Himself a first-rate artist, he surrounded himself with really talented men. His circle had already carved itself a niche in the theatre by the work it did for the Dyagilev Ballet[62] on its foreign tours. The Petersburg theatres could not get along without their help, advice and work and this gave them a great deal of practice and experience. They were unequalled in the field of scenery and costume. This group was the one that suited best the demands of our theatre.

However, there was one great BUT. First-class workers expect first-class pay. What the government-subsidized imperial theatres could afford was impossible for us, a comparatively poor private theatre. That is why we could but rarely allow ourselves the luxury and joy of working with well-known painters.

The first Petersburg painter we turned to when staging *A Month in the Country* was Mstislav Dobuzhinsky who was then at the very zenith of his fame. He was well known for his fine understanding and splendid interpretation of the sentimentally poetical moods that prevailed between the 1820's and 1850's, moods that were then popular with all artists, art collectors and society. There was no better painter we could wish for.

His tractability and excellent disposition made it very easy to get along with Dobuzhinsky. I chose a very simple practical method of working with him: one that did not constrain his will or fantasy and allowed him to have his say, and at the same time enabled me to see what attracted the artist most in a play and what he proceeded from in his creation. Here is what my method boiled down to: Dobuzhinsky would draw a rough outline in pencil of some scenery as he first visualized it. In these sketches he glided, so to speak, on the surface of his fantasy without trying to penetrate deep into it and without fixing any definite starting point from which he would proceed to create. It is not good when an artist defines the starting point right away and fixes it in his very first sketch, for it is then very difficult for him to abandon it and search for other forms. If he does, he is liable to become one-sided, prejudiced, fenced off by a wall which prevents him from seeing new perspectives and which the stage director has to assail and batter down.

My method allows the artist to glide on the surface of his fantasy without deciding on anything until he has first sorted out the material accumulated in his soul.

Unnoticeably for the artist, I use all sorts of methods to show him how to approach his basic task in the production. I take his sketches of the future scenery, hide them for a time and continue to stimulate his imagination in some new direction. And all this while I try to draw him, without showing him that, into my work as a stage director. This is how we build our architectural plan of the floor and scenery for the *mises-en-scène* which the actors and I need to create the proper atmosphere and convey the inner content and action of the play. Later, when the artist begins to give his opinion about costumes and make-ups, I gradually and unnoticeably direct his imagination along the lines followed by the actors, trying thus to blend his dreams with those of the actors.

Looking over the artist's pencil sketches, I try to grasp the *main* point which, like *leit-motif* in music, characterizes all his sketches. It is not easy to guess in this work the point from which the artist intends to proceed along his creative path, and to blend it with the basic line of the play and production so that they can henceforth proceed arm in arm. It is even harder to return the artist to the right path after he has deviated from it for one reason or another. In such cases compulsion is useless. What is necessary here is enthusiasm which will direct the artist along the proper path shown us by the author of the play, i.e., by his basic thought.

After collecting all the pencil sketches, most of which the artist has probably forgotten, I arrange a sort of an exhibition for him by hanging them all on the wall. It gives a clear idea of the creative path we have traversed and shows us how we are to continue. In most cases these sketches create a synthetic picture of the feelings and thoughts of both the artist and the stage director.

Fortunately, Dobuzhinsky and I were together in this preparatory stage. At first it was in Petersburg where our company was performing and then in Moscow, where he stopped at my house for lengthy periods, so that we saw each other every day.

There were no major differences between the artist, the stage director and the actors when we were preparing *A Month in the Country.* This was due in no little measure to the fact that Dobuzhinsky attended all the preliminary readings and rehearsals, acquainted himself with the work of the stage director and actors, and together with us sought for and studied the inner content of Turgenev's play. In a word, he did in his field what Ilya Sats was doing in his.

Having studied the play, the working plan of the stage director and the actors, and their peculiarities; having familiarized himself with their aspirations, dreams, hopes, difficulties and dangers, he would isolate himself in his studio, leaving it occasionally to see how our collective endeavour was progressing. He would often suggest make-ups and costumes for the actors, paying particular attention to their wishes and desires. As a stage director I took care to prevent any possible differences between the artist, the actors and other creators of the play in their aspirations. This, incidentally, is the main and the absolutely necessary condition for collective work, and it requires mutual concessions and mutual aims. If the actor heeds the desires of the artist, stage director and writer, and the latter respect the desires of the actor, then everything will go smoothly. People who love and understand what they are jointly creating will always know how to get along. Shame on those who cannot achieve that, who pursue not the basic, mutual aim, but their own personal one which they love more than collective work. Art cannot thrive in such conditions and it is no use speaking about it.

DUNCAN AND CRAIG

AT ABOUT THIS PERIOD, I came to know two great talents of the time who made a very strong impression on me–Isadora Duncan[63] and Gordon Craig.[64]

I attended Isadora Duncan's concert quite by accident, having heard nothing about her until then. Therefore, I was very much surprised to see that the rather small audience included so many artists and sculptors with S. I. Mamontov at their head, many ballet dancers, and numerous first-nighters and lovers of the unusual in the theatre. Isadora Duncan's first appearance did not make a very big impression. Unaccustomed to see an almost naked body on the stage, the spectators hardly noticed or understood the art of the dancer. The first number on the programme was met with tepid applause and timid attempts at hissing and whistling. But after a few numbers, one of which was especially convincing, I could no longer remain indifferent to the protests of the general public and began to applaud demonstratively.

By the time the intermission came, I was already an ardent admirer of the great artiste and rushed to the footlights to applaud. To my joy I found myself next to Mamontov, who was doing exactly what I was doing, and near

Mamontov were a famous artist, a sculptor and a writer. When the general run of the audience saw well-known Moscow artists and actors applauding, there was a great deal of confusion. The hissing stopped, but the spectators did not applaud yet. The applause, however, was not long in coming. As soon as they realized that there was no shame in clapping hands, the spectators began to applaud. This was followed by curtain calls, and at the end of the performance by an ovation.

From that time on I never missed a single one of Isadora Duncan's concerts. The necessity to see her was dictated from within by an artistic feeling that was closely related to her art. Later, when I became acquainted with her methods as well as with the ideas of her great friend Gordon Craig, I saw that in different corners of the world, for some unknown reason, there were different people in different spheres seeking for the same naturally born creative principles in art; when meeting they are amazed by the community of their ideals. This is exactly what happened at the meeting I am describing. We understood each other almost immediately.

I did not have the chance to become acquainted with Isadora Duncan on her first visit to Moscow. But during her second visit she came to our theatre and I received her as a guest of honour. This reception became general, for our entire company joined me, as they had all come to know and love her as an artiste.

Isadora Duncan did not know how to speak of her art logically and systematically. Excellent ideas came to her by accident, as a result of the most unexpected everyday facts. For instance, when she was asked who taught her to dance, she answered:

"Terpsichore. I have danced from the moment I learned to stand on my feet. I have danced all my life. Man, all humanity, the whole world, must dance. This always was and always will be so. In vain do people interfere with this, not wanting to understand the natural need endowed us by nature. *Et voilà tout,*"* she concluded in her inimitable Franco-American dialect.

Another time, speaking of a performance she had just gone through, during which visitors came to her dressing-room and interfered with her preparations, she explained:

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* That's all. (Fr.)

"I cannot dance that way. Before I go out on the stage, I must place a motor in my soul. When that begins to work, my legs and arms and my whole body will move independently of my will. If I do not get time to put that motor in my soul, I cannot dance."

At that time I was also searching for that very creative motor, which the actor must learn to put in his soul before he comes out on the stage. It is quite natural that in doing so I watched Isadora Duncan during her performances and rehearsals, when her developing emotion would first change the expression of her face, and with shining eyes she would pass to displaying what was born in her soul. When I recalled our casual talks about art and compared what we were both doing I clearly realized we were looking for one and the same thing, only in different branches of art.

During our talks, Isadora Duncan constantly referred to Gordon Craig, whom she considered a genius and one of the greatest men in the contemporary theatre.

"He belongs not only to his country, but to the whole world," she said, "and he must live where his genius will have the best chance to display itself, where working conditions and the general atmosphere will be best suited to his needs. His place is in your Art Theatre."

She wrote to him about me and our theatre, telling him to come to Russia. As for myself, I began to persuade our administration to invite the great stage director so as to give our art a new impetus at the time when it appeared that our theatre had finally broken out of the blind alley. I must give full credit to my colleagues. They discussed the matter like true artists and decided to spend a large sum of money in order to advance our art.

We asked Gordon Craig to produce *Hamlet.* He was to work both as artist and stage director, for he was both, and in his younger years had been a successful actor in Henry Irving's company. His artistic heritage was also of the best, for he was the son of the great Ellen Terry.

It was bitterly cold when Gordon Craig appeared in Moscow, dressed in a spring coat and wearing a felt hat with a large brim, with a long scarf about his neck. First of all it was necessary to dress him warmly for the winter in our Russian way, for otherwise he risked catching pneumonia. He immediately became good friends with Sulerzhitsky. They felt the presence of talent in each other and were always together—a very picturesque pair when seen together, both always joyous and laughing, Craig with his large figure, long hair, beautiful and inspired eyes, in a Russian hat and fur coat, Sulerzhitsky with his small figure in a short Canadian coat and a conical fur hat. Craig spoke an Anglo-German jargon, Sulerzhitsky an Anglo-Ukrainian patois, and this gave rise to a mass of *quid pro quo,* anecdotes, jokes and laughter.

When I made Craig's acquaintance, I felt as if I had known him for a long time. Our discussion on art seemed to be the continuation of a discussion that we might have been having the very day before. He enthusiastically explained his beloved fundamental principles, his original quest for a new art of movement. He showed me sketches of this new art in which lines and clouds and rocks created an unceasing impetus upward, and one believed that this would engender some hitherto unknown, new art. He spoke of the unchallengeable truth that it was impossible to put the human body side by side with flatly painted canvas, that sculpture and architecture and three-dimensional objects were needed for the stage. He admitted painted canvas only at the further end of architectural passages on the stage.

The excellent sketches he showed me of his former productions of *Macbeth* and other plays, no longer answered his needs. Like myself, he had come to hate theatrical scenery. What he needed was a simple background for the actor, out of which one would be able, however, to draw an endless number of moods with the help of lines and light spots.

Craig said that every work of art must be made of dead material–stone, marble, bronze, canvas, paper, paint,–and fixed for ever in artistic form. According to him, the living material of the actor's body, which changes continually and is never the same, was not useful for the purposes of creation, and Craig was against actors who had no striking or beautiful individuality and who were not of themselves artistic creations–like Eleonora Duse or Tommaso Salvini, to take two instances. Craig could not bear *cabotinage,* especially among actresses.

"Women," he said, "are ruining the theatre. They don't take proper advantage of the power and influence they exercise over men. They abuse their power."

Craig dreamed of a theatre without men and women, i.e., without actors. He wanted to replace them with puppets, who had no bad habits or bad gestures, no painted faces, no exaggerated voices, no smallness of soul, no worthless ambitions. The puppets would have cleansed the atmosphere of the theatre and added seriousness to the enterprise, and the dead material from which they were made would have given Craig an opportunity to suggest that Actor with a capital "A" who lived in his own soul, imagination and dreams.

But, as it became clear later on, his dislike of actors did not interfere with Craig's enthusiasm for the slightest hint of true theatrical talent in men or women. Sensing it, Craig would leap like a happy child from his chair and rush to the footlights, his long mane of hair thrown in disorder. When he saw the absence of talent, he would become furious and dream of his puppets again. If he could have been given Salvini, Duse, Yermolova, Chaliapin, Moskvin and Kachalov, and instead of giftless actors an ensemble of his own puppets, I believe he would have been happy and considered all his dreams fulfilled.

These contradictions of Craig's often prevented one from understanding his fundamental artistic desires and especially the demands he made on actors.

When he became familiar with our theatre, its actors and our working conditions, Craig signed up for a year as a stage director. He was entrusted with the production of *Hamlet,* and went to Florence for a year to prepare his plans.

A year later Craig returned with a complete plan for his production. He brought models of the scenery, and the interesting work began. Craig supervised everything and Sulerzhitsky and I became his assistants. We were joined in our work by stage director Mardzhanov, who later founded the Free Theatre in Moscow. In one of the rehearsal rooms, placed completely at Craig's disposal, we built a large model of a puppet stage. On Craig's instructions, it was lit up by electricity and equipped with all the facilities necessary for the production.

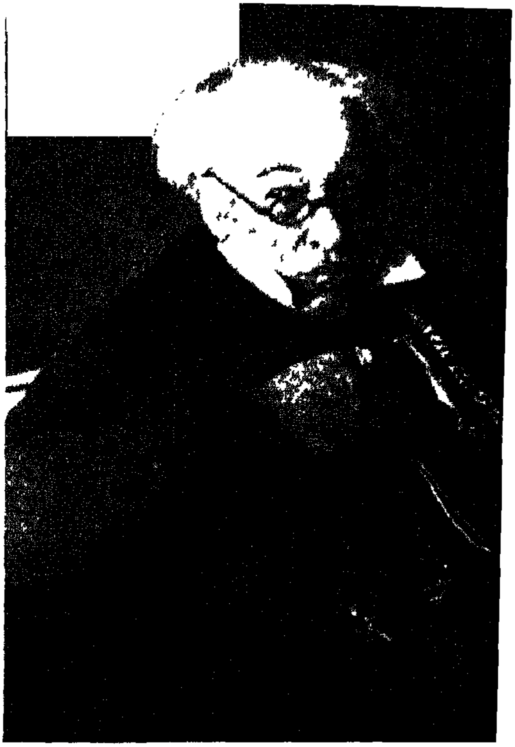
Like me, Craig had no faith in the usual theatrical methods and means of production: in wings, flies, and flat scenery, refused to have anything to do with them, and resorted to simple convex screens which could be placed on the stage in endless combinations. They hinted at architectural forms, corners, niches, streets, alleys, halls, towers, and so on. These hints were aided by the imagination of the spectator, who thus became one of the active creators of the production.

As Famusov in Griboyedov's *Wit Works Woe* (1906)

Craig had not yet made up his mind about the materials of which his screens were to be made. They were to be, so to say, organic, that is, as near nature as possible, and as far from being artificial as we could have them. Craig agreed to use stone, fresh timber, metal or cork. As a compromise, he used rough country linen and burlap, but he would not hear of a cardboard imitation of all these natural and organic materials. Craig disdained all factory-made and theatrical falsification. It seemed that nothing simpler than the screens could be imagined. There could be no better background for the actors. It was natural, it did not strike the eye, it had three dimensions, just like the actor's body, it was picturesque thanks to the numerous possibilities of lighting its architectural convexities which gave freedom of play to light, half-tone and shadow.

Craig dreamed of staging the entire performance without intermissions or the use of the curtain. The audience was to see no stage in the theatre. The screens were to serve as an architectural continuation of the auditorium and were to harmonize, blend with it. But at the beginning of the performance the screens were to move gracefully and their lines were to take on new combinations. At last they were to grow still. From somewhere there would come light that would give them a new picturesqueness, and the spectators were to be carried away, as if in a dream, to some other world which was only hinted at by the artist, but which became real in the imagination of the spectators.

When I saw the sketches of the scenery that Craig had brought with him, I realized that Isadora Duncan was right when she told me that her friend was great not when he philosophized about art, but when he took a brush and painted. His sketches explained his artistic dreams and problems better than any words. Craig's secret, however, was in his wonderful knowledge of the stage and of scenic effects. He was above all a genius as a stage director, but that did not prevent him from being a splendid painter.



As Famusov in Griboyedov's *Wit Works Woe* (1914)

He also brought with him models of screens, which he placed on the large model stage. His talent and artistic taste were expressed in the combinations of corners, lines and the methods of lighting the scenery with spotlights. Sitting at a table and explaining the play and the *mises-en-scène,* Craig would move the figures on the stage with the help of a long stick and actually demonstrate all the movements of the actors. We would follow the inner line of the development of the play, try to understand the motives of the change in position on the part of the figures and enter these motives in our copies of the play. When we read the very first page of the play it became evident that the Russian translation often misinterpreted the intaglio of the inner meaning of Shakespeare. Craig showed this with the help of a whole English library on the subject of *Hamlet* that he had brought along with him. There were major misunderstandings because of incorrect translation. One of these was as follows. In the scene between Hamlet and his mother, she asks him:

"What shall I do?"

And Hamlet answers her:

"Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed."

Usually this answer of Hamlet's was explained in the following sense: having lost faith in his mother, and being certain that she cannot be saved, he becomes ironical. Proceeding from this interpretation, actresses who play the mother often paint her as a sinful woman. But, as Craig insisted, Hamlet treats his mother with the tenderest of love, respect and care, for she is not bad, but simply light-minded and spoiled by the atmosphere of the court. Craig explained Hamlet's words, which seem to invite his mother to further debauch, as a purely English finesse of Shakespearean speech that gave the words themselves an opposite meaning. That is why Craig understood the rôle of the mother not as a negative but as a positive image.

I could quote many other instances where during our line-by-line examination of the translation we found many mistranslated places that refuted the old Russian interpretation of the entire play.

Craig greatly widened the inner contents of Hamlet. To him, Hamlet was the best of men, who walked the earth and became the victim of a cleansing sacrifice. Hamlet was not a neurasthenic and even less a madman; he was different from other people because he had glanced into the future world where his father was suffering. After that, Hamlet's idea of the actuality of life changed. He looked deep into earthly life in order to solve the mystery and the meaning of being; love and hate, the conventionalities of court life, began to mean altogether different things to him, and the problem which his murdered father set him and which was too difficult for an ordinary mortal, drove him to confusion and despair. If all could be settled by the murder of the new king alone, Hamlet would not have tarried a minute, but the crux of the matter lay not only in the murder of the king. In order to enlighten the sufferings of his father it was necessary to cleanse the entire court of evil; it was necessary to go with fire and sword through the whole kingdom, to destroy the harmful, to repulse old friends with rotten souls, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; to save those pure of soul like Ophelia. His superhuman efforts to solve the mystery of life made Hamlet some sort of superman in the eyes of the ordinary mortals who lived the humdrum life of the court among the little cares of life; a man unlike any other, and therefore insane. Speaking of the court, Craig meant the whole world.

This wider interpretation of *Hamlet* naturally revealed itself in the outward side of the production–in its monumentality, scope, generalization and decorative majesty.

The autocracy, power and despotism of the king, the luxury of court life were presented by Craig in gold colours that approached naïveté. For this he chose simple gilt paper very much like that used to decorate Christmas trees, and pasted it on all the screens used in the court scenes. He was also very fond of smooth, cheap brocade, in which the golden colour always preserves the imprint of childish naïveté. The king and queen sat on a high throne in golden and brocaded costumes, and from their shoulders there spread downwards a cloak of golden porphyry, widening until it occupied the entire width of the stage. In this tremendous cloak there were holes through which appeared a great number of courtiers' heads, looking up at the throne. The whole scene resembled a golden sea with golden waves. But this golden sea did not create a bad theatrical effect, for Craig showed the scene with the lights dimmed, under the gliding rays of stage lights that made the gold glitter terribly and ominously. Imagine gold covered with black tulle. This was the picture of royal greatness as Hamlet saw it in his torturing visions, in his solitude after the death of his father.

Craig's production showed in this scene the monodrama of Hamlet. He sat on the forestage, near the stone balustrade of the palace, sunk in his sorrowful thoughts, visualizing the foolish, licentious and unnecessary luxury of the court life of the king he hated.

Add to this scene the loud, threatening, piercing fanfares of brass instruments with unbelievable dissonances, which proclaimed to the whole world the criminal greatness and hypocrisy of the newly-ascended king. These fanfares, as well as the rest of the music used in *Hamlet,* were written with exceptional success by Ilya Sats, who, according to his custom, attended our rehearsals and took part in stage direction work before he began to compose.

Another unforgettable scene in Craig's *Hamlet* revealed the entire inner contents of the pictured moment. Imagine a long, endless corridor, beginning from the left wing on the forestage and passing in a semi-circle to the last wing on the right where the corridor seemed lost in the tremendous building of the palace. The walls rose so high their tops could not be seen. They were covered with gilt paper and lit by the inclining rays of stage lights. In this long and narrow golden cage paced the black figure of suffering Hamlet, silent and solitary, reflected in the golden mirror of the corridor walls. From beyond the corners he was watched by the golden king and his courtiers. Along the very same corridor the golden king frequently passed with his golden queen. Here also entered, noisily and triumphantly, a crowd of actors in. bright theatrical costumes, with long feathers in their caps, walking plastically, with theatrical effect, to the sound of flutes, cymbals, oboes, piccolos and drums. The procession carried brightly painted chests with costumes, and parts of gaudily painted scenery–trees made from some naïve medieval sketch with incorrect perspective; theatrical banner, weapons and halberds; carpets and cloth; tragic and comic theatrical masks; ancient musical instruments. These actors personified the beautiful and joyful art of the theatre; they gladdened the heart of the great aesthete and filled with joy the poor and suffering soul of Hamlet. Craig looked at the actors through Hamlet's eyes. At their entrance Hamlet showed himself to be the young enthusiast that he was until the death of his father. With special joy he greeted his dear guests; amidst the everyday life of the court their coming brought him for a moment artistic exultation, and he grasped it with avidity, in order to find relief from his spiritual suffering. Hamlet was just as artistically excited in his scene with the actors in their backstage kingdom where they were putting on make-up and donning costumes to the accompaniment of some musical instruments. Hamlet was a friend of Apollo, and this was his true sphere.

In the play within the play Craig unfolded a great picture. He turned the forestage into a stage for the palace performance and the backstage into something like an auditorium. The visiting actors were separated from their stage audience by the tremendous trap that we have on our Moscow stage. Two great columns marked the proscenium of the stage within the stage. There were steps to the trap, and from the trap to the backstage other steps which led to the high throne where the king and queen sat. On both sides along the walls there were several rows of courtiers. Like the king and the queen, they were dressed in shining gold costumes and cloaks, and resembled bronze statues. The court actors mounted the forestage in their gaudy costumes, with their backs to the footlights and the real audience, and their faces to the king and queen, and performed their play.

Meanwhile, hiding from the king behind one of the columns on the forestage, Hamlet and Horatio watched the king. The latter and his golden courtiers were plunged into darkness, only now and then a wandering ray of light fell on a golden costume. But Hamlet and Horatio and the court actors on the forestage were in full and glaring light that gave wide play to the rainbow costumes of the comedians. When the king trembled, Hamlet threw himself like a tiger into the depths of the trap towards the king. There was commotion; the king ran through the bright swath of light on the forestage, followed by Hamlet, who leaped after him like a beast on the track of his prey.

Not a whit less solemn was the final scene of duel that was furnished with many platforms at different heights, steps, columns, the king and queen on their great throne in the backstage, and the duellists on the forestage below. There was the garish grotesque of the costume of Osric the courtier, the hand-to-hand conflict, death, the body of Hamlet stretched on a black cloak. Far beyond the arch a veritable forest of spears entering the palace, and the banners of Fortinbras; he himself, like an archangel, mounting the throne at whose foot lay the bodies of the king and queen; the solemn and triumphant sounds of a soul-gripping funeral march; the slowly lowering gigantic banners covering Hamlet's body; he lies with the happy face of the great cleanser of the earth who had at last found the secrets of life on earth.

So did Craig depict the court that had become Hamlet's Golgotha. Hamlet's personal spiritual life ran its course in another atmosphere, infused with mysticism. The entire first scene of the play was imbued with that mysticism. Mysterious corners, passages, strange lights, deep shadows, moon rays, court sentries, unfathomable underground sounds at the rise of the curtain, choruses of variegated tonalities becoming one with underground blows, the whistling of the wind, and a strange, far-off cry. From among the gray screens representing the walls of the castle emerged the ghost who wandered softly searching for Hamlet. He was hardly noticeable, for his costume was of the same colour as the walls. At times he was altogether unseen, then he appeared again in the half tone of the light of a projector, in a mask, showing unbearable suffering and pain. His long cloak dragged behind him. The cries of the sentries frightened him, and he seemed to fade away into the niches of the walls.

In the next scene, taking place at the sentry posts of the palace, Hamlet and his friends hid in deep embrasures, waiting for the appearance of the ghost. Again the ghost slipped along the wall, blending with it, and the spectator, like Hamlet himself, hardly guessed that the ghost was there.

The scene with the ghost took place at the highest point of the palace wall, against the background of a clear moonlit sky which later began to redden with the first glow of the rising sun. The ghost led his son here to be farther away from the hell where he suffered and nearer to the heaven whither his spirit was straining. The transparent cloths covering the dead body of Hamlet's father seemed to be ethereal against the background of the moonlit sky. But the black figure of Hamlet in its heavy fur cloak bore strong witness to the fact that he was still chained to the material and terrible world of grief and suffering and vainly strove to guess the hardly palpable hints of unearthly being and life beyond the grave. This scene, and many others, were imbued with terrible mysticism.

There was even more of that in the scene of the monologue of "To be or not to be," which we were unable to stage according to Craig's plans. In his sketch Craig expressed himself in the following manner. There was a long palace corridor, gray and gloomy, that had lost in Hamlet's eyes its former brilliance. The walls seemed blackened, and hardly noticeable, ominous shadows crept up from beneath these walls. These shadows personified the earthly life that had become hateful to Hamlet, the frozen horror that took hold of him after the death of his father and especially after he had for a moment gazed into the next world. It is of his earthly life that he said with horror and disgust, "to be," that is, to continue to live, to exist, to suffer and to torture himself. The other side of Hamlet was pictured on the sketch by a bright swath of light in the sunny rays of which appeared and disappeared the silvery figure of a woman tempting Hamlet. This was what Hamlet called, "not to be," that is, not to exist in this unworthy little world, to go out of it, to die. . . . The interplay of darkness and light was to symbolize the struggle in Hamlet between death and life. All this was wonderfully pictured in the sketch, but I, as the stage director, could not bring it to life on the stage.

Having told us of all his dreams and production plans Craig left for Italy, and Sulerzhitsky and I began to grasp the ideas of the chief stage director and initiator of the production.

That was where our troubles began.

What a tremendous difference there is between the scenic dream of an artist or a stage director and its realization on the stage. How coarse are all the existing scenic means of incarnation. How primitive, naïve, and impotent is scenic technique. Why is the human brain so inventive in matters of killing one man by another as in war, or in questions of petty comforts in everyday life? Why is it that the same mechanics are so coarse and primitive where man strives to satisfy not his personal bodily needs but his best spiritual longings which rise from the purest aesthetic depths of the artistic soul? In this region there seems to be no inventiveness. Radio, electricity, light rays work wonders everywhere but not in the theatre, where they could find a completely exceptional use in the sense of beauty and for ever banish the disgusting glue paint, *papier-mâché* and properties. May a time come when newly discovered rays will paint in the air the shadows of colour tones and combinations of lines. May other rays light the body of man and give it that indefiniteness of outline, that disembodiment, that ghostliness which we know in our waking and sleeping dreams. Then, with a hardly visible ghost in the image of a woman, we shall be able to realize Craig's conception of Hamlet's "To be or not to be." Then, maybe, it will really be staged picturesquely and philosophically. But with the use of ordinary theatrical means, the interpretation suggested by Craig looked like a piece of hokum on the part of the stage director, and for the hundredth time reminded us of the helplessness and coarseness of theatrical means of production.

Knowing of no one apart Isadora Duncan who could have realized the image of bright death, finding no scenic means for showing the dark shadows of life as they were drawn in the sketch, we were forced to abandon Craig's plan for the production of "To be or not to be."

But this disappointment was not our last. Another unpleasant surprise was in store for poor Craig. We could not find a natural material for the making of the screens. We tried everything–iron, copper and other metals. But it was only necessary to think of the weight of such screens to give up the idea of using metal. With such screens we would have been forced to rebuild the entire theatre and to install an electric motor to shift the scenery. We tried wooden screens and showed them to Craig, but neither he nor our stage hands desired to move the heavy and dangerous walls. These threatened to fall at any moment and to crush all who stood on the stage. We tried cork screens, but even these were too heavy. In the end we reconciled ourselves to simple theatrical unpainted canvas on light wooden frames. Its light tone was out of harmony with the gloomy appearance of the palace. Nevertheless, Craig decided to use such screens, for they took on the variegated colours and half-tones of electric lighting which were entirely lost when darker screens were used. The play of light was very necessary for the mood of the play as interpreted by Craig.

But here we met further trouble. The great screens would not stand. If one screen fell, the others followed it. We invented countless methods to prevent them from falling, but all of these methods demanded special scenic construction and architectural changes for which we had neither the technical means nor the money.

The shifting of the screens demanded many long rehearsals with the stage hands. For a long time we were unsuccessful; now and then a workman would unexpectedly leap on to the forestage and show himself to the spectators; or now a crack would form between two moving screens and the audience would see the life backstage. And one hour before the *première* there was a real catastrophe. I was sitting in the auditorium and rehearsing the manoeuvres of shifting the screens for the last time. The rehearsal ended. The scenery was put up for the first scene of the play and the stage hands were allowed to rest and drink tea before the performance began. The stage was deserted, the auditorium was as quiet as a grave. Suddenly one of the screens began to lean sideways more and more, then fell on the screen next to it, and the entire scenery collapsed like a house of cards. There was the crack of breaking wooden frames, the sound of ripping canvas, and then the formless mass of broken and torn screens all over the stage. The audience was already entering the theatre, when nervous work to rebuild the scene began behind the curtain. In order to avoid another catastrophe during the performance, we were compelled to give up the idea of shifting the screens in full view of the audience and to accept the help of the traditional theatrical curtain, which coarsely but loyally hid the hard work of the stage hands. What semblance of unity the Craigian manner of shifting the screens would have given to the entire performance!

When Craig came back to Moscow he looked over our work with the actors. He liked it as he did the personalities of Vasily Kachalov, Olga Knipper, Olga Gzovskaya, Nikolai Znamensky and Nikolai Massalitinov–all of them on a par with the best actors of the world. The actors were very good, so was the crowd, but. . . . They used the old Art Theatre acting methods. I had failed to impart to them my new feelings. In our search for new means of doing that we carried out many experiments. For instance, I read Craig scenes and monologues from various plays and in various ways. The texts of these scenes and monologues were, of course, translated to him beforehand. I read in the old conventional French manner, then in the German, Italian and Russian declamatory style, in the Russian realistic way. I showed the new impressionistic method also. Nothing pleased him. On the one hand, he protested against the old conventionality of the theatre and, on the other, he was against the humdrum naturalness and simplicity which robbed interpretation of poeticalness. Like myself, Craig wanted perfection and craved for an ideal, i.e., simple, vigorous, deep, lofty, artistic and beautiful expression of living human emotion. But I could not give him that. I tried the same experiment with Leopold Sulerzhitsky, but he turned out to be even more exacting than Craig and stopped me every time he thought I was not sincere enough in my feelings or deviated, however little, from truth.

These séances proved important landmarks in my stage life. I understood the change that had occurred within me: the break between inner emotion and its physical incarnation. I thought that I was acting naturally, but in reality I was doing it in the conventional form born of old theatrical trumpery.

My new convictions were badly shaken and after these momentous experiments I spent many anxious months and years.

The work we did as actors and our production tasks were the same in *Hamlet* as they had been in *A Month in the Country:* to portray strong and deep emotions in the simplest possible theatrical forms. True, this time there was no lack of gestures, though there was still plenty of outer constraint. For that, as in *A Month in the Country,* we had to pay special attention to our *work on the rôle.* We had to analyze the spiritual essence of the play and the rôles as thoroughly and profoundly as possible. In this respect we encountered serious difficulties in *Hamlet.* To begin with, we again met with superhuman passions which we had to portray with restraint and extreme simplicity. *The Drama of Life* was a reminder of how difficult that task is. On the other hand, the inner analysis of *Hamlet* failed to reveal, as Turgenev's play had done, the complete score, so to speak, of the play and the rôles. There is much in Shakespeare that requires individual interpretation by the performers. In order better to understand the play and hit upon its gold-bearing vein, it was necessary to break it up into little parts. The play was broken up into so many of them, that it became difficult to see it as a whole. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what a towering cathedral will look like by examining separately each of the stones of which it will be built. And if we smash Venus of Milo into little bits and study separately her nose, ear and toes, I doubt very much that we can imagine the artistic charm of this sculptural masterpiece, the beauty and harmony of this divine statue. And that is exactly what happened to us: we had cut up the play into so many parts we could no longer see it as a whole.

The result was another deadlock, new disappointments, new doubts, temporary despair and all other inevitable concomitants of any quest.

I realized that we, the actors of the Art Theatre, had mastered certain methods of the new inner technique, that we could apply them successfully in modern plays, but that we had not found analogous methods to perform lofty, heroic plays, and that in this sphere there was much difficult work for us ahead.

Hamlet complicated my quest and work in another way too. The fact is that we wanted it to be a simple, modest production and it turned out to be unusually luxurious, magnificent and spectacular, so much so that it blinded the audiences to the acting of the players. It thus appears that the more one tries to make a production simple, the more spectacular and pretentious it is, and the more primitive its simplicity.

The show was a big success. Some people were enthusiastic about it, others criticized it, but everybody was excited, debated, read reviews, wrote articles, and some theatres "borrowed" Craig's idea and passed it off as their own.

EXPERIMENTING WITH MY "SYSTEM"

BY THIS TIME my "system," I thought, was quite ready for a practical test. I did not tackle the job alone, but in close co-operation with my friend and assistant, Leopold Sulerzhitsky. We naturally turned first to our colleagues of the Moscow Art Theatre.

However, I did not know the proper words, words that convince and persuade, words that penetrate into one's heart and not brain. I said ten words where one, but a weighty one, would suffice; I went into detail where I should have given a general idea. The result was that our first appeal failed. The actors were not interested in my long laboratory work. At first I ascribed my failure to their laziness, to their lack of interest in their profession, and even to ill will and intrigue, and looked for covert enemies among them. Or I comforted myself by another explanation, saying something as follows: "The Russian actor is very industrious and energetic when it comes to purely physical work. Tell him to pump water or rehearse a hundred times, shout at the top of his voice or strain his muscles—and he will do all that patiently and unmurmuringly to learn how to *act* a rôle. But if you touch his will and set him a spiritual task to arouse in him a conscious or superconscious emotion, to force him to live his rôle—you get a rebuff, for his will is not developed; it is lazy and capricious. The inner technique that I preach and that is necessary for promoting a proper *creative mood* is based in the main on will. That is why many actors are deaf to my appeals."

For years—at rehearsals, in sitting-rooms, lobbies, dressing-rooms, in the streets and wherever I met actors—I preached my new credo, but all in vain. They listened respectfully, in meaningful silence, and then walked away, whispering to each other:

"Why does he play worse himself? It was much better without his theories, when he played simply, without any monkey business."

And they were right. As an actor who had temporarily changed his customary work for experiments, I naturally retrograded as a performer. And this was noticed by all, not only by my colleagues, but also by the spectators. It made me very anxious. It was hard for me not to give up the new course, but, though hesitating considerably, I continued with my experiments, despite the fact that most of them were wrong and were undermining my prestige as an actor and stage director.

But in the heat of my enthusiasm I could not, and did not want to, work otherwise than my new discovery demanded. My obstinacy made me more and more unpopular. The actors worked with me against their will and preferred other stage directors. A wall rose between me and the company. For years our relations were cold. I would lock myself in my dressing-room, accuse them of routine, ungratefulness, disloyalty and treason, and continue my research with greater and greater persistence. Pride, to which actors easily fall prey, poisoned my soul, and I saw the smallest facts in the falsest light imaginable. This aggravated still more my relations with the actors. They found it hard to work with me and I found it hard to work with them.

Having failed to convince actors of our generation, Sulerzhitsky and I turned to young people from among the supernumeraries in the theatre and the pupils of his school.

Young people are more trustful, they do not demand proofs. They listened to us with enthusiasm, and this encouraged me. We began to give them free lessons on our "system," but for various reasons that failed too. Moreover, these young people were overburdened with work at the theatre.

After this second failure Sulerzhitsky and I decided to take our experiment to a private dramatic school run by A. I. Adashev and established a class according to my plans. After a few years it yielded results and many of Sulerzhitsky's pupils were accepted by our theatre. Among them was the late Yevgeny Vakhtangov, who was fated to play a prominent part in our theatre. As one of the first graduates of our "system," he was one of its most ardent champions and propagandists.

Watching Sulerzhitsky's work and hearing the praise showered by the pupils, some of the "unbelievers" asked us to give them an opportunity to learn our "system." Among them were actors who have since gained fame in Russia and abroad: Mikhail Chekhov, Nikolai Kolin, Grigory Khmara, Alexander Cheban, Vladimir Gotovtsev, Boris Sushkevich, Sophia Giatsintova and Serafima Birman.

It was in the midst of our work with Sulerzhitsky, i.e., during the 1910-1911 season, that the Art Theatre started rehearsing Tolstoi's *The Living Corpse.* There are a great many bit rôles in this play and they were distributed among our pupils.

During my lessons I had worked out my own language, my own terminology, which defined in words our emotions and creative feelings. The words we had invented could be understood by those who had studied my "system," but not by others. This impressed some people and irritated others, arousing their envy and jealousy. Two trends took form: one for and the other against us. Nemirovich-Danchenko saw that and at one of the rehearsals he addressed the company, insisting that my new methods of work should be studied by the actors and accepted by the theatre. With this aim in mind, Nemirovich-Danchenko considered it necessary that before any work was done on the production itself I should give a detailed explanation of my so-called "system" and said that rehearsals should be based on this "system." I was deeply touched by my friend's assistance and I am grateful to him for it to this very day.

At that time I was not yet prepared to solve the difficult problem that was set before me and did not fulfil my mission satisfactorily. It is only natural that the actors were not as enthusiastic as I wanted them to be.

Moreover, I was wrong to expect complete understanding from them. One could not demand from experienced people the same attitude for the new that I got from pupils. The virgin soil of the young people gave root to all that was sown in their souls. But experienced actors, who had developed definite methods, naturally wanted to test the new and filter it through their artistic prisms. They could not accept it in pell-mell fashion.

At any rate, all that had been polished in my "system" was accepted by experienced people seriously and thoughtfully. They understood that it was only a theory which the actor himself was to turn into a second nature by long labour and struggle, and then naturally introduce it into practice. Unnoticeably, each one of them accepted as best he could what I offered and developed it in his own way. But all that remained unpolished, vague and complicated in my "system" was severely criticized by the actors. I should have been happy about this criticism and made use of it, but my obstinacy and impatience prevented me from properly assessing the facts.

What was worse was that some actors and pupils accepted my terminology without checking on its meaning, or understood it with their minds, but not with their hearts. And worse still, they were quite satisfied with that, put the words they heard from me into use and started teaching others allegedly according to my "system."

They failed to understand that what I told them could not be assimilated or mastered in an hour or in a day, that it must be studied systematically and practically for years, all through life, all the time, that it must become a second nature with the actor and appear naturally, without his thinking of it. What is necessary for it is habit, as well as exercises, like those of the singer who trains his voice, like those of the violinist who develops in himself a true artistic tone, like those of the pianist who works to perfect the technique of his fingers, like those of the dancer who prepares his body for plastics and dancing.

These exercises were conspicuous by their absence, and have never been done; the so-called "system" was accepted on trust and that was why it had not yet shown any of its real results.

Moreover, the superficial assimilation of this "system" brought negative results. For instance, some of the experienced actors learned to concentrate, but this only made them repeat all their old mistakes and perpetuate them, so to speak. These people replaced the "system" with actors' feelings and habits, which led to the old stencils. They were taken for the new forms that the "system" spoke of. And since actors feel very comfortable in the atmosphere of stencils, nothing more was said. Such actors are convinced that they have understood all, that the "system" has helped them tremendously and they touchingly thank me and praise me for the discovery. But—"I will find but harm in that praise."

However it may be, after Nemirovich-Danchenko's memorable speech, my "system" was officially recognized by our theatre.

THE ART THEATRE'S FIRST STUDIO

AFTER OUR FIRST EXPERIMENTS with the "system" Sulerzhitsky and I came to the same conclusion which Vsevolod Meierhold and I had reached many years before that, namely, that no laboratory work can be done in the theatre itself with its daily performances, its worries about the budget and receipts, its heavy artistic activity and practical difficulties.

I doubt it very much whether the spectator, or the reader of this book, knows how much creative work has been done by my talented colleagues and friends of the Moscow Art Theatre, by Maria Lilina, Olga Knipper, Maria Samarova, Margarita Savitskaya, Yevgenia Rayevskaya, Yelena Muratova, Nadezhda Butova, Maria Grigoryeva, Ivan Moskvin, Vasily Kachalov, Vladimir Gribunin, Leonid Leonidov, Vasily Luzhsky, Alexander Artyom, Alexander Vishnevsky, Georgy Burdzhalov, Nikolai Alexandrov and all the others who helped us in the difficult job of building up the reputation of our theatre. Every one of our productions was expected to be novel and enlightening.

The imaginative Russian spectator does not recognize any limits to his demands and does not admit the impossible. As the saying goes, "he beats the one he loves." He either criticizes too much or praises too much, he does not take into account the fact that the actor may be tired, that the theatre–like ours, which was not subsidized–may be in financial straits.

The audiences made greater demands on our theatre than on the best state-subsidized theatres in the world. To maintain our prestige we had to work strenuously and this strenuous work undermined the health of some of us and literally killed others. What we urgently needed was the assistance and support of young actors.

With this thought in mind I decided, past failures notwithstanding, to establish an art studio for young people.

The first question was that of renting premises for this studio. Here we were helped tremendously by Nemirovich-Danchenko who, being at that time general director of the theatre with unlimited powers, granted the studio credit and came from his country-house in summer especially to find the necessary premises. In order to avoid extra expenses, he rented only three rooms—one big and two small—on the top floor of the building housing the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre (formerly the Lux Cinema). By strange coincidence, these were the rooms in which Vera Komissarzhevskaya herself once lived and part of the old premises of the Society of Art and Literature in which I began my theatrical career. The small size of the premises was necessary not only for financial reasons, but for training purposes. Practice had shown that a pupil with undeveloped creative will, emotion, temperament, technique, voice, diction, etc., should not overstrain himself at first. A large stage demands more of a beginner than he can give, and forces it out of him. What the young actor needs at first is a small hall, feasible artistic tasks, modest demands and an indulgent audience.

The young actor should not strain his rather weak voice, temperament and technique. The size of the theatre should not force him to strain his emotions and nerves and over-act for the benefit of a big crowd. The young actor of the studio should constantly play under the supervision of his instructor and after every performance the latter should correct him and explain where he was wrong, for these corrections and explanations turn public appearances into a practical lesson.

With time, when his spiritual and physical qualities have been developed, when he has performed his rôle dozens or hundreds of times, there will be no risk or danger in transferring him to the big stage, first to play the rôle he has mastered and then new parts. In this new phase of development it is highly important that he plays with experienced actors, that he appears together with them before the mass public, that he tries to solve together with them important aesthetic problems. I myself know how useful that is, having played (though unfortunately all too little) with such big actresses as Glikeria Fedotova, Maria Yermolova, Olga Sadovskaya and Polina Strepetova.

After joining the Moscow Art Theatre company, the former studio pupil was expected to help the older actors, understudy them and eventually become a shareholder of the theatre, which had by then been turned over to the actors themselves.

He was encouraged to maintain his ties with the studio, for in his free time he could work there as an actor or stage director, as an instructor or experimenter.

The artistic and administrative side of the studio was looked after by Sulerzhitsky, who received his instructions from me.

Stanislavsky as Count Lubin and Lilina as Darya Ivanovna in Turgenev's *The Provincial Girl* (1912)

Here we gathered all who wanted to study my "system." I began to give a full course of study as I had then worked it out. It was a pity that I could not give much time to this work, but to make up for it Sulerzhitsky worked all the harder. On my instructions, he taught all sorts of exercises that were necessary for the promotion of creative mood, for the analysis of the rôle and for the consistent and logical development of actors' will.

Along with our studies we rehearsed *The Wreck of the "Hope."* The preparatory work was in the hands of Richard Boleslavsky, with Sulerzhitsky in charge of production.

The rehearsals were continually held up because the actors were busy in the theatre as well, where a new play was in the throes of production. There were moments when it seemed impossible to combine our young actors' studio and theatre work and there was even talk of giving up the studio production and the other work. But I countered this resolutely:

"The show must go on, even if we have to do the impossible. Remember that your future depends on this production. You must have your 'Pushkino' phase just as we had when we were establishing the Moscow Art Theatre. If you cannot rehearse in the day, do it at night, until daybreak." And that is exactly what they did.

The production was staged for me and then for the actors of the Art Theatre headed by Nemirovich-Danchenko and the well-known artist Benois. The preview was exceptionally successful and showed clearly that the young actors could perform with a simplicity and depth of which we had not even suspected them. I credited that, with some justification, to our joint "system" effort.

After this there were public performances with the receipts going for the material needs of the studio. There could as yet be no talk of paying the actors for their work, and they performed gratis. The following year, after the studio had won general recognition, the Moscow Art Theatre came to its assistance in a big way and included it in its budget. The studio was renamed the Moscow Art Theatre Studio and later, with the establishment of similar institutions, the Moscow Art Theatre's First Studio.

The First Studio's greatest artistic achievement was the production of Charles Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth,* which was adapted for the stage by Boris Sushkevich, who also played in it. This play was for the First Studio what *The Sea-Gull* had been for the Moscow Art Theatre.

Sulerzhitsky put all his heart into this work. He gave it his feelings, emotions, convictions and dreams and so imbued the actors with his spirit that the show was unusually moving. The play required more than just ordinary acting; it needed something especially intimate that would penetrate into the very heart of the spectator.

It was in this play perhaps that the heartfelt notes of the superconscious feeling first sounded just as I had been imagining they should. In a big, uncomfortable auditorium, in which actors had to raise and strain their voices and over-act, these subtleties were lost and never reached the spectator.

A great deal was written and said in the newspapers, society and theatres about the new studio. At times it was cited as an example to us, the older actors, and we felt that side by side with us there was growing competition, and competition, as is known, is the motive force behind progress.

From that time on the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre began to pay more attention to what was said about the new approach to art. I was gradually regaining my popularity.

Meanwhile the work in the First Studio, under Sulerzhitsky's talented management, was going on well. He was a man of ideas, a Tolstoian. He demanded that his pupils serve art. In this, of course, he had my warmest support. Bad manners, rudeness and impudence on the part of his pupils hurt him to the quick. He quarrelled with them, he persuaded them, he set them his own example, he educated this new generation which, because of social and political circumstances, had not received a proper education. However, they had received some stage training when they worked for our theatre. Almost all of them had appeared hundreds of times in mass scenes. Such labour, hard and of purely supernumerary nature, developed in them a sense of duty, which is necessary in the theatre. But in much they needed to be re-educated, and Sulerzhitsky took care of that, devoting himself body and soul to it and undermining his health, which was bad as it was. In fact, the doctors had diagnosed a case of neglected nephritis which he had contracted in Canada.

It is not easy to educate adults who want to be independent and teach others. But Sulerzhitsky was a man of a merry and lively disposition. His reprimands and orders were interspersed with jokes and jests, which no one knew how to use better than he. It is impossible to remember all of the jests and practical jokes he played, not only in his free time, but also when it was necessary to liven up the atmosphere at rehearsals. Here is one of them. One young and talented pupil fell into despair after the least failure at rehearsals. It was enough to pat him on the back, praise him and tell him that he was gifted to revive him. In order not to repeat the same encouragement all the time Sulerzhitsky had a poster made with the following legend: "X. is a very talented man." This poster was nailed to a stick and every time X. began to lose his self-confidence the poster would be brought into the rehearsal room. The way the door would be opened, the comic look of the one who carried the poster usually caused general laughter. The atmosphere would be refreshed, X. would become happy and the rehearsal would go on with a new lease on life.

Sulerzhitsky dreamed of creating with me a sort of spiritual order of actors. Its members were to be men and women of lofty views and ideas, of wide horizons, who knew human soul and strove for noble artistic ideas, who were willing to sacrifice themselves for art. We dreamed of hiring an estate that would be connected with the city by tram or train and to construct a stage in the main building to present our studio performances. The actors would have quarters in the wings, part of which would be rebuilt into an hotel for the spectators, whose tickets would entitle them to a room for the night. They would be asked to come long before the beginning of the performance. After a walk in the park surrounding the house, a rest and then a meal in the dining-room, having shaken the dust of the city from their shoulders, the spectators would enter the theatre. In this way they would be ready for the aesthetic pleasure in store for them.

The receipts of such a suburban studio would come not only from the performances, but from household economy and from the cultivation of soil. Spring sowing and autumn harvesting would be done by the actors themselves. This would be extremely important for the general mood and the atmosphere in the studio. People who meet daily in the nervous atmosphere of the theatre cannot establish the close and friendly relations necessary for true co-operation in art. But if, besides meeting on the stage, they met in the open, to work together in the field, their hearts would open up, their ill feelings vanish and their physical labour cement their unity. Their stage work would stop for spring and autumn field-work and would be resumed after the harvest. In winter, when they were free from creative work, they would work on the production of plays, i.e., paint scenery, sew costumes, make models. The idea of cultivating soil was one of Sulerzhitsky's oldest dreams; he could not live away from land and nature, especially in spring. He longed for country life. And so the farm of our projected studio was to be under his personal management.

This dream, however, remained a dream, although we were able to carry out part of it.

I bought a large plot of land on the magnificent shore of the Black Sea in the Crimea, a few miles from Eupatoria, and placed it at the disposal of the studio. With the receipts from a show in Eupatoria we erected communal buildings, a small hotel, a stable, a cow shed, barns for farming implements, and a store-house for seed, food-stuffs, etc. Each of the actors of the studio had to build himself a house with his own hands, and the house was to become his own property.

For two or three years studio actors, headed by Sulerzhitsky, went to Eupatoria for the summer and led the life of pioneers. They brought stones and cut them for communal buildings. We built these temporary houses in the same fashion as children build houses of blocks: instead of a roof we had canvas, instead of doors and windows we had carpets and cloth curtains, instead of a floor we had sand. Inside we had comfortable furniture with stone divans covered with pillows as in a medieval palace, curtains on the walls, Chinese lanterns to give us light in the evening. The company spent the entire summer in the sun and became as brown as berries. Sulerzhitsky applied the methods he had used with the Dukhobors in Canada, and maintained strict discipline. Each of the actors had his communal duty–one was a cook, the other a coachman, the third a housekeeper, the fourth a boatman, and so on. The fame about the pioneering group spread throughout the Crimea, and attracted the curious, who came to see the "wild" actors of the Moscow Art Theatre Studio.

Once again I had to renew my quest in the field of scenery and principles of outer stage presentation. This revision of theatrical potentialities was necessitated by the construction of a studio stage in the low-ceilinged room we had rented. We did not want it to resemble a homey amateur stage on which nothing looks serious; we wanted it to impress by the originality with which it tackled the tasks set it.

What complicated the whole thing was that I did not have enough money, in fact there was too little of it. In a low room we could not have a raised stage, for the actors would then touch the ceiling with their heads. Therefore, instead of placing the actors on an elevation we did that with the spectators. We arranged the seats in an amphitheatre rising from the stage, and the spectators thus had an excellent view of it with no one in front disturbing them. This had its advantages for the stage too: without being raised it was high enough. It was not separated from the first row of seats: there were no traditional footlights, for the light came from above. In the intermissions, the stage was closed off from the public by a cloth curtain.

This created an intimate atmosphere. It seemed to the spectators that they were sitting in the very room where the action was taking place, that they were accidental witnesses of what was going on. It is in this intimacy that lay the studio's main charm.

There could be no question of ordinary scenery, for it would have been impossible to bring it up to the top floor where the studio was located. Moreover there was no place to store it, neither on the stage nor in the little room next door which had been partitioned into dressing-rooms.

Instead of ordinary scenery I introduced a system of broadcloth and linen, which was quite a novelty in those days. Folded like bed sheets and piled in a corner, they took very little place. Each cloth had hooks sewn on to it. With the aid of sticks it was raised to the ceiling and hooked to the metal net covering it. In fact, it could be hooked up anywhere to give the desirable contour of a room.

This system was perfected when the First Studio moved to more spacious premises in what is now Sovietskaya Square.

The new type of stage demanded new production methods, and I had to look for them. For instance, for Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* which has many scenes, I invented a special kind of a curtain, hung not broadwise, but lengthwise. This permitted to conceal the scenery in the left half of the stage and simultaneously open the other half. While the play is on here, stage hands prepare the scenery behind the curtain on the left.

When we were staging Tolstoi's *Tale of Ivan the Fool* (on a similar stage, at the Second Studio), I invented special rolling platforms to reduce the number of intervals between scenes. While the play went on on one platform, stage hands were busy backstage with another. The lights would go out, and the first platform would be replaced by the second.

In the second act of Andreyev's *Youth,* in which the scenery shows a railway line passing off a dense forest, I made use of black velvet. We depicted the moonlit trees in the foreground with the aid of strips of cloth and towels. The velvet itself, serving as a background, conveyed the impression of the vast depth of the forest. This made our tiny stage look much bigger than it was. And to make it appear still more so, I put a velvet-covered box near the background, with little holes and lights in it. The illusion was one of station lights in the distance. Thus the entire scenery was made up of a few strips of cloth and a velvet-covered box. I developed this principle on a wide scale for Alexander Blok's *The Rose and the Cross,* which, however, was never staged.

Just how scenic our new studio methods were may be judged by the following fact:

One day, analyzing the merits and demerits of the work done by Russian and foreign painters for the theatre, I asked a well-known artist and a connoisseur of painting:

"Tell me, what scenery do you consider best as an artistic background for the actor? What scenery suits best the scenic tasks of our theatre?"

It was quite some time before I met him again.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "The scenery that best suits the task of the theatre was the one used in *The Cricket on the Hearth* by the First Studio."

The scenery and properties in question were very simple. Properties, like shelves with various things and the cupboard, were painted on veneer and then cut out. Almost the entire scenery was made by the actors of the studio, among whom, it is true, there was an artist. This scenery, of course, was not artistic from the point of view of painting and colour, but it was original.

When the above-mentioned painter began to explain his reasons and to analyze the various details of the scenery in *The Cricket on the Hearth,* I realized that what he considered most successful was exactly what the actors themselves had done on their own initiative, stimulated by the spiritual tasks of the play or some rôle. This convinced me still more that what the theatre needed was not just a painter, but a painter who had the makings of a stage director and who understood the fundamentals and tasks of our art and technique.

I shall not speak of the last phase of the First Studio's existence, for at that time I was no longer taking part in its work. After reaffirming itself, it followed an independent artistic course and eventually became the Moscow Art Theatre No. 2.[65] Space does not allow me to speak of many moments in the life of the Moscow Art Theatre that are not connected with my own artistic evolution, even of such moments on which an historian of the theatre should dwell with particular attention because of their paramount importance. Neither shall I speak of or analyze the artistic activity of our pupils.

The Second Studio, established soon after the First Studio, was originally a private dramatic school organized by a trio of our actors: Nikolai Alexandrov, Nikolai Massalitinov and Nikolai Podgorny. In its last year the school graduated a galaxy of talented young players, among them Alla Tarasova, Maria Kryzhanovskaya, Yekaterina Kornakova, Raisa Molchanova, Nikolai Batalov and Vsevolod Verbitsky. The late Vakhtang Mchedelov and I organized them into a studio[66] which they themselves managed because I could not give them any financial support. For their first performance they chose Z. Hippius's *The Green Ring* and this play put the studio on its feet. In the autumn of 1924, its young actors joined our theatre and have already proved their worth in our recent productions.

Simultaneously with the Second Studio there came into being the Third Studio[67] under the guidance of Yevgeny Vakhtangov. This studio (now the Vakhtangov Theatre) was also at one time affiliated to the Moscow Art Theatre. After that came the Fourth Studio[68] (now the Realistic Theatre), which was joined by some of our actors who, for one reason or another, could not find their right place in our theatre and who eventually formed a much-needed regional troupe.

Finally, I should mention the Moscow Art Theatre's Musical Studio (now the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Studio), which was organized and headed by Vladimir Ivanovich and which staged a number of splendid shows.[69] But since I did not take part in the activities of the Musical Studio and of the Third and Fourth studios, I shall not speak about them. To describe them briefly would be tantamount to showing disrespect for them.

It is for the same reason that I do not dwell on the artistic activity of the Jewish "Habima" Studio, headed by N. L. Tsemakh, where for several years the late Vakhtangov worked at my request first as an instructor and then as a stage director, and where I myself read a whole course of lectures on my "system."

Still less can I speak of the Armenian Studio which was formed by S. I. Khachaturov or of our foreign disciples, like the well-known Polish actress Stanislawa Wysocka (Stanislawska), who set up a studio patterned after our First Studio in Kiev before the war, and the Bulgarian actors and stage directors who were sent by their former government for practical work in our theatre or training in our school.

CABBAGE PARTIES AND THE "CHAUVE-SOURIS"

THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE thrived not only in the sphere of drama, but also in another sphere, at the opposite pole–in the sphere of parody and joke.

With us this actually went back to the days of the Moscow Society of Art and Literature, where we often arranged evenings of parody and joke. The Moscow Art Theatre also arranged such evenings–or cabbage parties, as we call them. The first took place in 1902 in the rehearsal barn on the Bozhedomka, the second–at the request of Anton Chekhov–on New Year's Eve in 1903 at the Moscow Art Theatre, the third, also at the theatre, in 1908 on the occasion of its tenth anniversary.

The first public cabbage party, with the proceeds going to the needy actors of our theatre, was held on February 9, 1910.

This cabbage party, like the others before it, took several days to prepare. The actors worked everywhere: in the dressing-rooms, in the corridors, in every corner, during the performances, in the intermissions and at night. The amount of energy the theatre spent on the preparations and the results achieved in this short period were amazing.

The night before the cabbage party the theatre changed beyond recognition. The seats on the main floor were replaced by tables, at which people had their dinner. The waiters were the young actors and pupils who were not engaged in the performance proper. Under the tables we concealed various lighting effects and rattlers. All the barriers in the auditorium were decorated with picturesque tapestries and garlands; from the ceiling hung lanterns, knick-knacks and garlands; on the balconies we hid two orchestras–string and brass; there were huge baskets with rattlers, whistles and toy balloons. The public gathered at 8 p.m. and the auditorium was gradually plunged into darkness. We gave the audience just enough time to get used to the dark and then filled the hall with din: the trumpets blared, the drums beat, the string instruments sang on their highest notes, the wind instruments wheezed, the cymbals rang, the thunder machines of the theatre roared. In fact, we put our entire sound-effect machinery into operation. At the same time, together with this bacchanalia of sounds, we switched on all the projectors, blinding the audience. And simultaneously we let loose a shower of confetti, serpentine and multicoloured balloons from every corner of the auditorium, from the balconies down and from the main floor up.

The programme that evening was extremely diversified.

We staged *Helen of Troy*–a burlesque on the famous operetta, with Nemirovich-Danchenko as conductor. Vasily Kachalov played Menelaus, Olga Knipper was Helen, Ivan Moskvin was Paris and Leopold Sulerzhitsky was Ajax. By public request Sergei Rachmaninov conducted *The Apache Dance,* which was performed by Alisa Koonen and Richard Boleslavsky.

There was a Punch-and-Judy show in which Moskvin played the part of a servant, a painstaking sort of a clown, who raised and lowered the curtain at wrong times. He "helped" the jugglers, giving them wrong things, betraying their secrets and making them look like fools.

Wrestling was a great fad in those days and we staged two "matches." In the first, a Frenchman (Kachalov), graceful, thin, in tights and female pantaloons, wrestled with a hefty Russian coachman (Gribunin), dressed in a shirt and rolled up pants. There was no wrestling, of course, just a parody on it, a caricature satirizing unscrupulous judges and wrestlers. Their tricks were given away by the tactless servant (Moskvin). In the second, the tall and powerful Chaliapin, in an Oriental costume, wrestled with short, plucky Sulerzhitsky. Then these wrestlers sang Ukrainian songs.

There was a mind reader who, hypnotized, gave away the secrets of the theatre. Four Vienna grisettes–Moskvin, Gribunin, Luzhsky and Klimov (an actor of the Maly Theatre)–danced and sang a "piquant" ditty with impossible words that were supposed to be in German:

Ich bin zu mir heraus,
Ich habe Offenbach,
Zu mir spazieren Haus
Herr Gansen Mittenschwach.

There was also the following number:

A huge cannon was rolled out, followed by little Sulerzhitsky in some unknown foreign uniform made of leather and oilcloth. He made a long speech, parodying the English language. His interpreter explained that the

"English colonel was preparing to undertake a dangerous trip to Mars. He would be placed in the cannon and shot into the air." Then came his wife. There were touching and tearful farewells, also supposedly in English.

The fearless hero was approached by Kachalov and Gribunin, allegedly dressed as artillerymen. They had just cleaned and oiled the cannon, and now, with small sewing-machine oilers in their hands, they began to oil his costume so that he might slip into the cannon the more easily. Up in the balcony a large hoop covered with white Indian paper was ready to receive the adventurer. Everything was ready. The farewells were over. The brave colonel made his farewell speech before his long journey. He was lifted to the mouth of the cannon and pushed in. Then Kachalov and Gribunin loaded the cannon with powder and lit the gunwick, from a distance—as a precaution. The audience, and especially the ladies, covered their ears, expecting a thunderous explosion. But to the amazement of all, the shot was no louder than the pop of a toy cracker, although the two artillerymen were thrown to the ground, and the auditorium was filled with Sulerzhitsky's horrible cry. The paper hoop was torn and in the hole was the figure of the brave colonel. The brass band struck a flourish. The curious thing is that one spectator averred that he saw Sulerzhitsky fly through the air.

And there was another number that created a sensation. On our stage we have a revolving ring. Around it we made a low barrier, as in a circus, and placed several rows of chairs. In the background there was a panorama of a circus filled with people. Opposite the audience was the entrance for the circus artists, and an orchestra above it. In the revolving ring was put a wooden horse on which Burdzhalov, dressed as a female bare-back rider, danced the *pas de châle,* leaping through paper hoops. Those who held these hoops stood outside the ring while the horse "ran" in the revolving ring.

Then came my number. I appeared as the ringmaster, in a tail-coat, in a top hat slightly askew for greater effect, in white breeches, white gloves and black shiny boots, with a huge nose, black moustache, thick black eyebrows and a wide black imperial. The circus attendants in their red uniforms lined up, the band struck up a triumphant march, I entered and bowed to the public. After that the chief equerry handed me a whip, I cracked it (it took me a whole week of hard practice to master that) and a trained stallion, played by Alexander Vishnevsky, flew out into the arena.

The circus number ended with a grand finale cotillon by the whole company, headed by Olga Knipper, Kachalov, Moskvin, Luzhsky and Gribunin, who appeared in the ring on toy *papier-mâché* horses with doll legs while I stood at the entrance with a large bell and rang for changes in figures. The actors danced on their own feet.

It was as a master of ceremonies at our cabbage parties that our actor Nikita Baliev first displayed his unusual talent. His inexhaustible humour, ingenuity and wit, his ability to captivate the audience and to balance on the edge of impudence and merriment, insult and joke, and his ability to stop in time and to turn an insult into a joke—all that made him an interesting performer of a new genre.

Baliev was well assisted by Nikolai Tarasov, who thought up many entertaining jokes and numbers. A shareholder in our theatre and later one of its directors, Tarasov proved his friendship for us by helping us out with a considerable sum of money when we badly needed it for our trip to Berlin.

In one of Baliev's numbers there was a telephone on the stage that kept on ringing. Baliev's questions and answers made it clear to the audience what the matter was. For instance, one of our cabbage parties coincided with the election of the president of the Duma, and Moscow was eagerly awaiting the news. The huge prop telephone rang and Baliev answered the call.

"Who's speaking? Petersburg? The Duma?" Baliev became excited and turned to the audience.

"Quiet, ladies and gentlemen, quiet please! I can't hear them."

The spectators listened with expectant silence.

"Who's that?"

Baliev suddenly changed completely. A servile look appeared on his face and he began to bow low to the man he was speaking to.

"How do you do? I'm very happy. . . . Thank you for phoning. . . ."

A pause, then he continued:

"Yes, yes, a cabbage party . . . very merry . . . many people . . . the theatre's packed. . . ."

Another pause. Then firmly:

"No!"

Again a pause. Baliev became excited.

"No, I assure you, no, no, no. . . ."

After every pause he became more and more nervous, more abrupt, more excited and more resolute in his refusals. It was clear that the party on the other side of the line was asking for a favour. To make his refusal more definite, Baliev shook his head and hands and then abruptly and firmly brought the talk to an end:

"Sorry, I can't. Absolutely no."

With these words he hung up irritatedly and strode off the stage, saying with displeasure:

"Mr. X (he named one of the politicians who was coveting the chairmanship of the Duma) wants to know whether we need a chairman for our cabbage party."

Some of the jokes at our cabbage parties grew into satires, burlesques and grotesques that were new to Russia. The job of staging them was tackled by Baliev and the talented Tarasov.

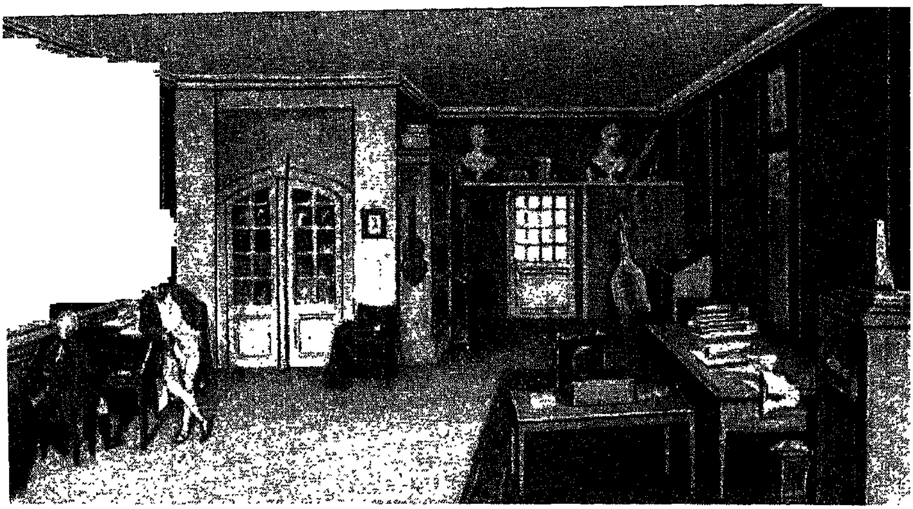
At first they established a sort of a Moscow Art Theatre actors' club in the basement of the Pertsov house near the Church of the Saviour. The place became extremely popular with our actors and players from other theatres. Later it was reorganized into the "Chauve-Souris" Theatre and this necessitated a change in the repertoire: the programme became more diversified and included genuinely artistic pieces with songs, dances and declamation. This repertoire became typical of the "Chauve-Souris" and popular the world over.

THE VOICE

The Pushkin Show

THE YEAR 1914 hurled the world into a war.

In Moscow life was seething. The theatres were working as never before, trying to profit by the situation by staging half-baked patriotic plays. They failed one after another—and little wonder! Can theatrical, pasteboard war vie with the real that was felt in the souls of people, in the streets, in the homes, with the war that thundered and destroyed everything at the front. Theatrical war at such a time was an insult and a caricature.



A. N. Benois's sketch of the scenery for Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri* (1915)

Pushkin plays, produced by Nemirovich-Danchenko, with scenery by A. N. Benois and with the best actors of the Moscow Art Theatre taking part—that is how we reacted to the events. It was decided to stage *The Stone Guest, A Feast During the Plague* and *Mozart and Salieri* (I played the latter).[70]

Many people, while they appreciate Pushkin's verse, underestimate the content of his poetry. I did the opposite. I decided to get to the bottom of the drama's inner content. I thought it was not enough to portray Salieri simply as an envious man. To me, he was a priest of art, the ideological murderer of one who was shaking the very foundations of this art. As the curtain rose, my Salieri was not sitting with his powdered wig on and enjoying his morning tea. The audience saw him in his morning gown, his hair in disorder, exhausted after a night of work which proved all in vain. The hard-working Salieri is quite justified in demanding a reward from Heaven and in envying the idler Mozart, who creates masterpieces without exerting himself. Salieri envies Mozart, but he tries to fight this evil feeling. He loves Mozart's genius more than anyone else. And it is all the more difficult for him to decide on murder; all the greater is his horror when he realizes his mistake.

Thus, I tried to stress not envy, but the struggle between criminal duty and genius worship. More and more new psychological details crept into my plan and this complicated the general creative task. Behind each word there was vast spiritual material, every bit of which was so dear to me that I could not part with it.

There is no need now to analyze whether my portrayal of the Pushkin character was right or wrong. I was sincere in my acting; I felt the very soul, thoughts, desires and inner life of my Salieri. I lived the part correctly while my feelings went from the heart to the periphery of the body, to the voice and tongue. But the moment it had to be incarnated with the aid of movements and especially of words, there was, quite against my will, a twist–the portrayal became false and out of tune, and the outward form had nothing in common with my sincere emotion.

I shall not speak here of my bodily strain and of its consequences. I have already said enough about it.

The main thing this time was that I could not master Pushkin's verse. I overstressed the lines and gave each word greater meaning than it really had, with the result that poet's words became inflated.

Men say there is no justice upon earth,
But neither is there justice in the Heavens. . . .

Each of these words meant so much for me that its meaning was too big for form. It overflowed and grew into a wordless, but significant pause–for me. These inflated words were separated from each other by big intervals, and that stretched my lines to such an extent that one forgot the beginning of the phrase by the time I came to its end. And the more feeling and spiritual content I put into the text, the more senseless and heavy it became, the harder it was to fulfil the task. The result was constraint which, as always, brought forth spasmodic convulsions. My breath became short, my voice duller and creakier and weaker, with its diapason narrowing down to five notes. It rattled instead of singing. In my attempts to make it louder I resorted, against my will, to the usual hackneyed acting tricks, i.e., to false pathos and vocal cadences and graces.

That was not enough. Constraint, suppression and tension, on the one hand, the fear of words in general and of Pushkin's verse in particular, on the other, and, finally, the feeling of falseness–all this made me speak too softly. Right up to the dress rehearsal I actually whispered my lines. It seemed to me that by speaking softly I could hit upon the proper tone and that there was less chance of falseness being recognized in a whisper. But both lack of self-confidence and whispering are out of place in Pushkin's ringing verse; they only enhance falseness and betray the actor.

I was told that the fear of the word and heaviness of speech came from incorrectly expressing thoughts and scanning poetry. I was advised to mark all the words in the rôle that I had to stress. But I knew there was more to it than that. It was necessary temporarily to stop thinking of the rôle, to calm down my over-excited feelings and imagination, to find the harmony that pervades Pushkin's tragedy and that makes his verse so lustrous and light–and then return to the rôle. But there was no longer a possibility of doing that.

There was something else that prevented me from mastering Pushkin's verse, and that I clearly realized while working on *Mozart and Salieri.*

What a torture it was to be unable to incarnate correctly one's lofty emotions. A mute who mumbles his feelings inarticulately to the woman he loves probably experiences similar prostration. So does a pianist when he hears how badly his inner artistic feeling is distorted by an untuned piano.

The more I listened to my own voice, the more I realized that it was not the first time that I was reading poetry badly. That was the way I had always spoken on the stage. I was ashamed of my past. I would have liked to turn back the clock to iron out the impression I had created. Imagine a successful singer who finds in his old age that he has always sung out of tune. At first he does not want to believe it. All he does is go to the piano to check on a note, on a line of song, and sees that he either sings a quarter of a tone too low or half a tone too high. That is exactly how I felt in those days.

As I look back I realize that many of my acting methods or shortcomings–bodily strain, lack of composure, over-acting, conventionalities, tic, tricks, vocal graces and pathos–are due to the fact that I have not mastered speech, which alone can give me what I need and which alone can express what is going on within me. When I realized inwardly that beautiful and lofty speech was one of the powerful means of expression on the stage, I became very happy. But when I tried to make my speech more beautiful, I saw how hard that was and became afraid of the difficult task before me. It was then that I really saw that we spoke badly and ungrammatically not only on the stage, but in life too; that our trivial and simple speech in life was inadmissible on the stage; that simple and beautiful speech demanded a science all its own, a science that had its laws. Only I did not know them.

After that I paid attention to sound and speech, both on and off the stage. I began to hate more than ever actors' loud voices, their crude attempts to camouflage them to sound natural, the dry rattling speech, solemn monotony, mechanical trochees, anapests, etc., rising chromatic passages, vocal leaps to the terza and quinta, going low for a second at the end of a phrase or a line.

There is nothing more disgusting than an over-sweet voice reciting poetry, a voice that rises and falls like waves during a dead calm. How I hate these awful women reciters who read with excessive tenderness lovely little poems about stars, and how furious I grow when I hear actors declaim Nekrasov or Alexei Tolstoi with exaggerated temperament. I just cannot bear the razor-blade sharpness of their diction.

As Krutitsky in Ostrovsky's *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man* (1910)

There is another way of reciting poetry: modest, powerful and noble. I saw it in some of the lines of the world's best actors. It would pop up for a minute, only to disappear in the usual theatrical pathos. There is real musicalness in it, a dignified, precise and diversified rhythm, a good, well-presented inner picture of a thought or feeling. I felt this musical recital of poetry, but could not master it.

But it was enough for me to start reciting Pushkin's verse loudly for all of my old habits to come to the surface. To get away from them I stressed the meaning of words, the spiritual content of each phrase, without forgetting either the rhythm or rhyme. Yet all I got was heavy, meaningful prose. I suffered, trying to understand what my inner hearing was revealing to me. . . . But all in vain.

Nemirovich-Danchenko and Benois were quite successful, as were some of the actors, headed by Vasily Kachalov. Space does not permit me to eulogize Benois who created wonderfully majestic scenery and splendid costumes for the play.

As for me—some people praised me, others (and there were more of them) criticized me. In this book, both before and now, I judge myself not by press reviews and public opinion, but by own feelings and thoughts. But I would not exchange my failure for any success in the world, for it taught me a great deal.

After this play I resumed my quest and this time it was more difficult than ever. It seemed as if I had lived in vain, for I had learned nothing along the false path I had taken in art.

It was in this agonizing period that I happened to attend a concert given by one of our best string quartettes.

What happiness it is to master musical time, pauses, metronome, tuning fork, harmonization, counterpoint, to know exercises that develop technique and the terminology that defines artistic concepts and ideas about creative feelings and emotions. Music has long recognized the meaning and necessity of this terminology. It has its legalized foundations on which one can depend in creating, whereas in the theatre we create at random. Chance cannot be a foundation and without foundation there can be no real art, just dilettantism. We need a foundation in our art, especially in our art of speech and recital.

That evening, at the concert, I thought this foundation should be sought for in music. Speech and poetry, after all, are music and song. The voice should sing even when its owner is speaking or reciting poetry; it should be melodious *like a violin and not rattle as hail rattles on a roof.* How to make the sound of speech continuous, harmonizing words and whole sentences, stringing them together like beads and not tearing them into separate syllables? I felt at that concert that if I could master this continuous violin-like sound I would be able to perfect it, just as violinists and cellists do, i.e., make the sound deeper, thicker, thinner, lighter, higher, lower, legato, staccato, piano, forte, glissando, portamento, etc. I would be able to break the sound, make rhythmic pauses, create all sorts of intonations. It is this long, continuous note that we lack in our speech. And yet every dilettante is sure that his sound is continuous and not rattling, that he makes the right pauses and has proper intonations. How wrong they are! S. M. Volkonsky says that their declamations are monotonous—monotonous as only a one-coloured wall panel can be. There is really no continuity in their voices, just variegated graces. And that is not because they sound and vibrate in space; on the contrary, it is because their voices do not sound, do not vibrate, but fall flat. To create an illusion of melodiousness of voice, banal reciters resort to various vocal graces which create the disgusting conventionality, the quasi-lyrical speech and declamation which one is so eager to escape. I am seeking for natural melodiousness. I want to hear the melody of vowels in my words. I want the vowels in a line of words to harmonize with each other and I do not want the con-

As Prince Abrezkov in Lev Tolstoi's *The Living Corpse* (1911) sonants to rattle, but to sing, for many of them also have their own peculiar drawn-out, guttural, sibilant and buzzing sounds. And when all these letters learn how to sing, then there will be music in our speech and we shall have the material with which to work. Then I shall begin Salieri's lines with composure and confidence:

Men say there is no justice upon earth,
But neither is there justice in the Heavens. . . .

And the whole world will hear the powerful and solemn protest to Heaven from God-forsaken mankind. Then there won't be, as there was with me, the bitter grumbling and false pride of the shrewish and envious Salieri. I won't have to resort to all sorts of traditionally pathetic graces to make my vowels melodious. I won't have to mark time on every syllable of the verse. When the voice sings and vibrates of its own, there is no need to resort to tricks; it must be used to express simply and beautifully important thoughts and emotions. It is such a voice and manner of speech that is necessary for Pushkin, Shakespeare and Schiller. Little wonder that when Salvini was asked what a tragedian needed most, he answered, paraphrasing Napoleon:

"Voice, voice and more voice!"

How many new possibilities melodious speech presents for conveying emotions on the stage! It is only then that we shall realize how ridiculous we are now with our home-bred methods and manner of speech that is limited to five or six notes. What can we express with five rattling notes? Yet, it is with the aid of these notes that we want to convey complex feelings. That is tantamount to playing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on a balalaika.

Music helped me to solve many problems that had been racking my brain and it convinced me that an actor should know how to speak.

Isn't it strange that I had to live almost sixty years before I understood, i.e., before I felt with all my being, this simple and well-known truth—a truth that most actors do not know?

THE FEBRUARY 1917 Revolution was followed by the October Revolution. The theatre was given a new mission to fulfil: it was to open its doors to the broad masses, to those millions of people who thereto had had no opportunity to enjoy cultural entertainment. As the good Leizer in Andreyev's *Anathema* despaired of being able to feed, despite his wealth, the millions who were demanding bread, so were we helpless, too, in the face of the multitude that came to our theatre. But we were anxiously happy and proud that such an important mission had been entrusted to us. In the beginning we tried to find out how the new spectator would react towards our repertoire which was not written for the simple people. There exists an opinion that one must stage peasant plays for the peasants, plays that he will understand; that for the workers one must stage plays about their own life. This is not so. The peasant, seeing the play about his own life, usually says that he has grown tired of it at home, that he has seen enough of it as it is, that he is infinitely more interested in seeing how other people live, in seeing a more beautiful life.

At first we had mixed audiences: there were poor people and rich, intellectuals and non-intellectuals, teachers, students, coachmen, janitors, clerks, street cleaners, chauffeurs, conductors, workers, servants, soldiers. We presented our usual repertoire once or twice a week in the huge Solodovnikov Theatre, taking along our scenery and properties. It is only natural that the atmosphere of a play intended for a small theatre should lose a great deal in a large and bleak hall. Nevertheless, our plays always attracted full houses and were watched attentively and silently, with ovations invariably rocking the auditorium at the final curtain. The Russian, more than anyone else, loves a show and the more it excites and captivates the soul, the more it attracts him. The ordinary Russian spectator loves a drama at which one can weep a little, philosophize about life, listen to words of wisdom, more than any noisy vaudeville show which gives no food for thought. The spirit of the plays in our repertoire was unconsciously absorbed by the new spectator. True, he missed some of the finer points, did not react or laugh at the places we meant him to. But there were other places which would evoke unexpected reaction and the laughter would show the actor that there was humour in the text which had somehow escaped him before.

It is a pity that the law of mass reaction to stage impressions has not yet been studied. Its importance to the actor cannot be exaggerated. It is a mystery why in one city certain places in a play arouse a lively reaction and others do not, while in another city it is the other way round. We did not know why the new spectator did not laugh at places we thought he should, nor did we know what to do to reach his feelings.

They were interesting performances, and they taught us a great deal–chiefly, to feel the new atmosphere in the auditorium. We understood that these people came to the theatre not so much to be amused as to learn.

I remember one peasant friend of mine, who came regularly once a year to Moscow with the express purpose of seeing the entire repertoire of our theatre. Usually he stopped at my sister's, took out of a bundle a yellow silk shirt which with time became too short and tight for him, put on a pair of new boots, velvet trousers, pomaded his hair, and then came to have dinner with me. He could not hide a happy smile when he walked across the parquet floor, when he sat down to a clean, beautifully laid dinner table with an air of something akin to piety, when he put a clean napkin under his collar, took a silver spoon in his hand. He seemed to make a religious ceremony of our everyday meal.

After the dinner he would ask me for news of our theatre with even greater enthusiasm, and then go to the theatre where he occupied my seat. Watching the performance, he would redden and turn pale from excitement and enthusiasm, and when the play ended he could not return home to sleep; he would stroll alone in the streets for hours, in order to clarify his impressions and sort out his thoughts and emotions, so to speak. When he returned, my sister would help him in this work, so difficult for him. Having seen our entire repertoire, he would pack his silk shirt, trousers and boots and return to his home. From there he would write numerous philosophical letters which helped him to digest and continue to live over the store of impressions which he had brought home with himself from Moscow.

I believe there were quite a few such spectators at our theatre. We felt their presence and our artistic duty towards them.

"Yes," I thought then, "our art is not eternal, but it is the most irresistible of all arts so far as our contemporaries are concerned. How powerful it is! Its influence is created not by one man, but simultaneously by a group of actors, artists, stage directors and musicians; not by one art, but simultaneously by many most diverse arts: music, drama, painting, declamation, dancing. It influences not one man, but simultaneously a crowd of human beings and this develops a mass emotion that sharpens perception."

This collectivity, i.e., the simultaneous efforts of many different artists, this comprehensiveness, i.e., the action not of one, but of many arts at one time, this mass perception, show their full worth in the impression they make on this new, unspoiled, trusting and unsophisticated spectator.

This power of the stage over the spectator revealed itself in exceptionally bold relief at one performance which I shall always remember. It was almost on the eve of the October Revolution. On that night troops were moving towards the Kremlin, mysterious preparations were being made, silent crowds were going somewhere. In other places, some of the streets were completely empty, the lights were out, the police patrols removed. The Solodovnikov Theatre was packed by a thousand-strong crowd gathered to see Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* which depicted the life of that class against whom the people were preparing to rise.

The auditorium, filled almost exclusively with simple folk, buzzed with excitement. The atmosphere on both sides of the footlights was one of suspense. We actors, in our make-ups for the play, stood near the curtain and listened to the buzzing in the auditorium.

"We shall never finish the performance," we said. "They will chase us from the stage."

When the curtains parted, our hearts throbbed in the expectation of possible excesses. But Chekhov's lyricism, depicting the dying Russian country-seat, seemingly so untimely at that moment, caused a lively reaction even in the existing conditions. It was one of our most successful performances judging by the attention we got from the spectators. It seemed to us that all of them wanted to wrap themselves in the atmosphere of poetry and bid farewell to the old life that now demanded purifying sacrifices. There was a tremendous ovation after the performance, but the spectators left the theatre in silence, and who knows–perhaps many of them went straight to the barricades to fight for the new life. Soon shooting began in the city and we made our way home, slinking along the walls.

Then came the October Revolution. For one year and a half our performances were free to all who received their tickets from factories and institutions where we sent them, and we met face to face with spectators altogether new to us, many of whom, perhaps the majority, knew nothing not only of our theatre but of any theatre. But yesterday our theatre had catered to a mixed audience, including intellectuals. Today we were faced by an altogether new audience which we did not know how to approach. Neither did the spectators know how to approach us and how to live with us in the theatre. The routine and the atmosphere in the theatre naturally changed. We were forced to begin from scratch–to teach this new spectator how to sit quietly, not to talk, to come to the theatre at the proper time, not to smoke, not to crack nuts, not to bring food into the theatre and eat it there.

At first this was very hard to do, and on two or three occasions after the atmosphere of an act had been spoiled by the crowd of the still uneducated spectators, I was forced to appeal to them on behalf of the actors who were placed in an impasse. On one occasion I could not restrain myself, and spoke more sharply than I should have done. The crowd was silent and listened very attentively. I repeat this happened only twice or three times. I still cannot imagine how these two or three audiences managed to tell of what had happened to all the other visitors to our theatre. Nothing was written about it in the papers, no decrees were issued on the subject. Why did a complete change in the behaviour of the audience take place after that? They came to the theatre fifteen minutes before the curtain, they stopped smoking and cracking nuts, they brought no food with them, and when I, unoccupied in the performance, walked about the foyer filled with our new spectators, youngsters would rush to all the corners, warning those present:

"*He* is coming."

He, obviously, meant the man who had addressed the audience. And the spectators would take their hats off, obeying the rules of the House of Art, which managed the theatre.

A tremendous number of people passed through the doors of our theatre during the war and the Revolution–people of all descriptions, from all provinces and of all the nationalities that composed Russia. When the Western Front gave in before the enemy, Moscow was filled with new-comers who sought to find consolation in the theatre. The new audience brought its own habits, its good and bad qualities; we were forced to educate them in the discipline of our theatre, and we would hardly achieve that when a new stream of refugees would pour into Moscow from the north, or from Siberia in the east, or from the Crimea or the Caucasus in the south. They all came in through the doors of our theatre and left through them perhaps for ever.

With the outbreak of the Revolution many classes of society passed through our theatre—there was the period of soldiers' deputies from all the corners of Russia, of young people, and last, of workers and peasants to whom art was a thing unknown. They were spectators in the best sense of the word; they came to the theatre not by accident but in tense expectation of something important, something they had never seen before. Their admiration for the actors was touching, but the pity was that there were many giftless men who called themselves actors. There appeared crowds of people who had no relation whatsoever to art, but who exploited it mercilessly, sticking like moss to a good and profitable business.

They compromised us, servants of art. And this harmed to a considerable extent the cordial relations that had developed between the actors and the popular masses. True, there were among us actors who failed to rise to the occasion—the momentous occasion in the theatre's life when it met millions of new spectators.

CATASTROPHE

IN JUNE 1919 a group of Moscow Art Theatre actors, headed by Olga Knipper and Vasily Kachalov, left for guest performances in Kharkov, where a month later they were cut off from Moscow by Denikin's advance. Our colleagues found themselves on the other side of the front line and could not return home. Some of them were with families, others were not fit physically to undertake the difficult and dangerous journey across the lines. Nikolai Podgorny was the only one who risked it. Keeping his promise to return whatever happened, he displayed real heroism, crossing several fronts often at a grave risk to his life.

Thus, for several years our main troupe was divided in half and we represented a broken-up theatre that pretended it existed. In reality we had no troupe–just a few good actors and some promising, but inexperienced beginners and pupils. At the same time we could not very well fill the gap, firstly, because we were expecting our colleagues to return from the south and if they did we would not have known what to do with the ones we had recruited, and, secondly, because we made big demands on our actors, demands that required years of special training. The Moscow Art Theatre did not hire actors; it collected them.

At first, the Moscow half of the troupe tried to get along without outside assistance, but our colleagues across the front line had to resort to the help of others, who, like they, found themselves cut off from Moscow. Happily for them, there were a few of our former pupils and they were the first to join the troupe. The others had never been connected with our theatre. The troupe behind the enemy lines called themselves the Moscow Art Theatre.

Our position in Moscow was no less difficult–Maria Lilina, Yevgenia Rayevskaya, Lydia Koreneva, Ivan Moskvin, Leonid Leonidov, Vladimir Gribunin, Vasily Luzhsky, Alexander Vishnevsky, Nikolai Podgorny, Georgy Burdzhalov and I had to play either with beginners or with stage hands who had never thought of making acting their career, but who stuck loyally to the theatre.

How could we achieve co-ordination, artistic unity and perfection with such a company? To make things worse, this catastrophe occurred at the time when our deadly enemies, taking advantage of the circumstances–of which I cannot speak in this book for lack of space–launched a general offensive against us. Seeing our ranks broken up, they multiplied their blows and rallied other hostile elements to their cause.

All this happened at a moment when the position of actors, ideologically devoted to their art, was extremely difficult. Despite government assistance, the salaries we received were insufficient to make ends meet. Actors had to look for additional income on the outside and grabbed any side jobs that came their way.

These side jobs were a legal, generally recognized and ineradicable evil in the theatre. They lured actors from the theatre, spoiled performances, forced postponements of rehearsals, undermined discipline, brought actors cheap success and injured our art.

Cinema was another dangerous enemy. With the money they had film studios could afford to make better offers to actors and "stole" them from the legitimate stage.

There was yet another evil: a mania to teach. Innumerable little studios, circles and schools mushroomed up, each actor considered it imperative to have his own studio and his own system of training. Really talented actors did not need them, for they made enough by giving concerts and working in films. It was talentless actors who opened studios. The results were obvious. Many a promising young actor—who like the talented former serf Shchepkin could have refreshed our art—was spoiled because he was taught old stencils.

There were other difficulties which usually accompany popular upheavals that made life hard for our and other theatres. At such times art is knocked off its pedestal and given utilitarian tasks. Many claimed that the old theatre was outdated, superfluous, that it should be mercilessly destroyed.

It is surprising that in the circumstances our and other theatres have survived. For this we are obliged to Anatoly Lunacharsky and Yelena Malinovskaya[71] who knew that it was wrong to liquidate old culture for the sake of renovating art, that it was necessary to perfect old culture to enable it to fulfil new and more complicated creative tasks set it by the years of such catastrophic calamities as war and by the revolutionary era when art must be effective and speak of *big* things and not small.

Malinovskaya not only looked after the artistic values placed in her safe keeping, but showed deep concern for the actors too. "Yelena Konstantinovna," we would telephone her, "singer X has holes in his shoes and risks losing his voice, and actor Y has no ration card and is starving." And Malinovskaya would get into her old carriage and go out to get shoes and food for the needy persons.

"CAIN"

WE WHO HAD REMAINED in Moscow hoped to weather the catastrophe alone, i.e., without the assistance of the studio. For that we had to find and stage a new play. The times we were living in demanded one of considerable inner or social significance and, simultaneously, one that would not require many actors.

In this respect Byron's *Cain* proved most suitable and we decided on it despite the fact that after the Pushkin lesson I was well aware that the task was much too difficult for me. But there was no other way out.

We distributed the rôles in Byron's mystery partly among the experienced actors who were in Moscow and partly among young players and even stage hands. Being in serious financial straits, we had to economize to the maximum on the production itself and scenery.

The scenic principle of production would have required the services of an experienced artist, for only a real master could paint the beautiful scenery—the Land without Paradise, Hades and the Abyss of Space—needed for the play. We did not have enough money for that, so I chose another principle—the architectural one. We economized on this because all we needed for such a plan was the scenery depicting the interior of a cathedral, which could be used in all the acts and scenes. Let the monks present a religious mystery in the cathedral. The big columns and the statues of saints around them; the heads of monsters and reptiles that had survived in Gothic architecture from the Middle Ages; the caves, catacombs, gravestones, monuments and sepulchres—all this could be used for the scene of Hades where Lucifer brings Cain. Their ascent up the stairs to the gallery of the cathedral was meant as flight into space.

The night procession of the believers, dressed in black monastic attire and carrying numerous candles, would have created an illusion of a starry sky across which sped the two travellers. The big old lanterns held aloft on long sticks by monks, the lights flickering dimly, would have made one think of fading planets, while incense smoke reminded one of clouds. The mysterious light emanating from the altar in the background, the organ music and hymns would have alluded to angels, while their ritual appearance at the end of the play made one feel the proximity of a holy place, i.e., Paradise, according to the play.

The huge stained-glass windows of the cathedral, which darkened ominously at one moment or became bright red, yellow or blue at others, would have created an excellent illusion of daybreak, moonlight, sunlight, twilight and night.

The tree of knowledge with its fruits and the Serpent coiling round its trunk, naïve and picturesque as sacred images and sculptures were in the Middle Ages; two stone altars on either side of the tree–these were to be all the props in the first and last acts of this naïvely religious production of Byron's mystery.

The actors would have been dressed in monastic attire with parts added to make them look like costumes.

Unfortunately, even this production plan of mine was too expensive for us, for the architectural scenery and the considerable number of stage hands required demanded a big financial outlay. We had to abandon the plan and resort to the sculptural principles of production–luckily, one of the representatives of this art, Nikolai Andreyev,[72] was working with us. Instead of the usual *mises-en-scène* and layouts we had plastic groups, eloquent poses and mimetics against a background that accorded with the atmosphere of the play. In the Hades scene, the suffering souls of the superior beings, who had allegedly lived on earth, were represented by huge statues, three times the human size, set up on platforms of different heights against the background of our life-saving black velvet. These statues were very simple and easy to move–Andreyev sculptured huge heads with shoulders and arms, stuck them on poles and covered them with cloaks of ordinary cloth of a colour reminding one of the clay of which statues are made. The cloth, hanging loosely from the shoulders to the floor, was tastefully folded.

Set upon and against black velvet and illuminated in a particular manner, these statues looked ghostly and weird. Cain and Lucifer, who flew across the stage in the second scene, were placed upon high, velvet-covered platforms, which blended with the black background and were invisible to the audience. There was a complete illusion of Cain and Lucifer passing through space. A group of extras, dressed in black costumes, carried lighted transparencies representing flickering planets. The black sticks of these transparencies and the black-clad extras also blended with the black background, creating the impression of planets drifting in the sky.

We abandoned the sculptural principle only in the first act, substituting it with the architectural. The scenery depicted a portico, the entrance and stairs rising to the Land without Paradise. The stage was girded by a big colonnade, rising with gigantic stairs towards the background. The trick was to make the columns and the entire structure so big as to dwarf the actors. In the play, the beings who had once lived on the earth were shown rebuilding the dilapidated temple. The audience saw only its lower part, i.e., the first few steps and the base of the columns. It was up to the spectators to imagine the rest.

By using the same yellowish cloth we succeeded in making this architectural scenery simple, easy to move and cheap. The huge, three-metre thick columns were made of the same material. It was nailed at the bottom and at the top to wooden hoops, one of which was fixed to the floor and the other to the ceiling. The cloth covering stretched out to look like columns.

Unfortunately, even this modest production was beyond us. It seemed that we were not born under a lucky star.

We were unable, for instance, to find enough black velvet in Moscow and had to substitute it with dyed cloth. The latter, however, does not absorb rays and our illumination tricks, which were supposed to make the statues ghostly, proved in vain. The scene of Hades with its shadows looked crude and primitive.

We actors and stage directors (I was assisted by Alexander Vishnevsky) did a yeoman's job staging the play, in the course of which I continued my quest in the sphere of diction, musicality of verse, naturalness and simplicity of speech. We succeeded in expressing ourselves fairly vividly and in conveying to the audience the philosophical idea of the play. It was not easy to get the spectators to listen attentively to the complex and deep thoughts expressed in lengthy dialogues.

Some of the rôles, especially that of Cain, played by Leonid Leonidov, created a tremendous impression. There was one rehearsal that shook me so deeply I cannot forget it. It happened in the first phase of our work, at the time we were polishing up the play in its preliminary, not stage, form and had not yet come to rehearsing it in costumes.

The financial straits we were in forced us to hasten with the *première* and to stage the play before it had properly matured, so to speak. A show like that may well be likened to a miscarriage or a prematurely born child. A perfectly rehearsed play is one of the primary demands of theatrical art.

But here we were again unlucky. At the general rehearsal, when the packed auditorium and the excited actors were waiting for the curtain to go up, some of the electricians went on strike. We were forced to look for people to replace them and that held up the performance, with the result that both the actors and the spectators began to lose interest in the play. But that was not the end of our troubles. At the very beginning something went wrong with Cain's costume and that upset Leonidov so much that he literally forgot how to play and spoke his lines mechanically.

The raw, unpolished show was not successful. Yet it had its uses. I, for one, made two very important discoveries–though they were quite well known to others.

First, the sculptural principle of production, which compelled me to pay attention to actors' movements, brought home to me that it was not enough to be able to speak well and rhythmically; it showed me that we also had to *move* well and rhythmically, that there were certain laws to guide us. This discovery impelled me to further research.

Second, this time I realized (i.e., felt) with greater clarity that the sculptural and architectural principles of production had their advantages for the actor. Indeed, of what use to me as an actor is a background painted even by the greatest of artists? I do not see it; it does not help me; on the contrary, it disturbs me, for it obliges me to show myself the artist's equal in talent and even his superior. If I cannot do that, the picturesque background will make me look pale and inconspicuous.

The sculptor and, to some extent, the architect create on the proscenium properties that we can use to express our emotions creatively. We can sit on a throne or on a step, lean against a column, lie down on a stone, assume an expressive pose by leaning against some sculpture and not stand straight as a stick before the prompter's box on the bare, even floor of the stage in which the artist is not interested. What the painter wants is only the wings and the background. The sculptor, on the other hand, wants the floor on which we live on the stage. The sculptor's task is quite akin to the actor's. He does not create on a bidimensional place as the artist does; he creates in space that has a third dimension, i.e., depth. He is accustomed to feeling the relief body of man and his physical abilities to express inner life.

All this compelled me temporarily to forsake my allegiance to the artist in favour of the architect and the sculptor. At the same time, along with the study of diction and speech which I continued in the Opera Studio, I began to pay more attention to my own and other actors' movements. It was then that I began to dream of a ballet studio in which there would be greater possibilities for that.

Cain was soon removed from the repertoire of our theatre. We had to revive old plays in a hurry and, simultaneously with this difficult job, rehearse a new one. Our desperate plight compelled us to seek the assistance of the First and Second studios.

The main purpose of the studios, according to preliminary plans, was to train players to replace old actors. It was precisely to fill up our thinning ranks and to pass on to them the theatre we had built up that we were training the youth. Briefly, the studios were the arboretum for the park that was the Moscow Art Theatre.

I must admit in all justice that when the time came these studios fully justified their purpose and the hopes we had placed in them, and readily came to the assistance of the Art Theatre. Without them we would have had to close down.

It is with pleasure, warmth and gratitude that I recall in this book the service they had done us.

Seeing that working in two places was too difficult for the young actors, we did everything to alleviate their burden and where they were required to work for two hours we cut it down to one. This, of course, could not but affect the artistic side of our work.

THE OPERA STUDIO

WHEN Yelena Malinovskaya was put in charge of the state academic theatres, one of the reforms she undertook was aimed at putting the dramatic side of the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre's operas on a higher footing. She asked the Moscow Art Theatre to help her and Nemirovich-Danchenko and Vasily Luzhsky agreed to direct one of the operas. I offered to organize a studio in which the Bolshoi singers could consult me on questions of acting, and younger singers could systematically go through the necessary course.

The rapprochement of the Bolshoi Theatre and the Moscow Art Theatre was decided upon, and in December 1918 there was a big party to celebrate the event. The singers of the Bolshoi played hosts to the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre. The party was a merry, touching and memorable one. There were tables and a stage set up in the halls and foyer of the Bolshoi Theatre, and its singers waited on us and served food that was luxurious in those lean days. We were all dressed for the evening. When we arrived, the Bolshoi soloists greeted us with a cantata especially composed for the occasion. Then there was a supper with speeches. The Bolshoi soloists–Antonina Nezhdanova, the tenor Dmitry Smirnov, the basso Vasily Petrov, and others–rendered songs; Vasily Kachalov, Ivan Moskvin and I read. After supper came the actors from the Moscow Art Theatre studios with a programme of entertaining numbers very much like those which we used for our cabbage parties. Then there was dancing, *petits jeux,* legerdemain.

A few days later I met the singers for a heart-to-heart talk about art in the foyer of the Bolshoi Theatre. I answered many questions, illustrating my replies by acting and singing–the latter as best as I could. Gradually, in my soul there awoke those old and half-forgotten feelings and enthusiasm which my operatic studies with the old Fyodor Komissarzhevsky had instilled in me. My love for dramatic, rhythmic action set to music revived.

I cannot complain about the reception that the singers gave me. They were very attentive. Many of them were interested in my experiments and exercises, and worked willingly and without any false theatrical pride. Others were present merely as spectators, thinking that simple observation was enough to learn all the nuances of dramatic art. They were quite wrong there. One cannot become stronger from simply watching others do gymnastic exercises. Our art, like gymnastics, demands a great deal of systematic exercise. Those who studied made considerable progress, and after some time the public noticed the change in their acting.

A small group of singers who appreciated the new studio, which was well looked after by Yelena Malinovskaya, brought great sacrifices to its altar and conducted themselves heroically. They worked at a time when life had not returned to normal after the first storm of the Revolution and did not ask for a reward. Many singers with beautiful voices had to tramp in snow and rain without rubbers on their torn shoes. Nevertheless, they defied the difficulties and attended the classes in the studio.

But there were things which they could not overcome. For instance, their work in the Bolshoi Theatre was an unconquerable obstacle to their work in the studio. So were the concerts they gave to earn enough to feed themselves.

During the winter I was not once able to gather a complete quartette for the rehearsal of a given excerpt. Today the soprano could not come, tomorrow the tenor, the day after the mezzo. Or it would happen that the basso, because of a concert, was free only from eight to nine, and the tenor, because of an appearance in the first act of the current opera in the Bolshoi Theatre, was free only after nine. In the beginning of the rehearsal of the quartette we would do without the tenor, and when he came, without the basso, who would hurry off to his concert. Overcoming the unusual obstacles, we were able, by the end of the 1918-1919 season, i.e., in spring, to prepare several excerpts, which we showed in the studio hall to some singers, musicians and actors of the Moscow Art Theatre headed by Nemirovich-Danchenko. The preview was very successful and aroused much discussion. But what was more important was that it convinced me of the fact that I could be of help to the opera.

In the next season I agreed to continue directing the work of the Opera Studio,[73] but on different conditions. The members of the studio were to be chosen from among young singers, who were to study a number of subjects under my guidance before being allowed to make their stage début in the studio. My conditions were accepted and I worked out the programme of an opera course that accords with the aims I set myself. These, generally speaking, were as follows.

An opera singer has to deal with three arts at the same time–vocal, musical and stage. Therein lie, on the one hand, certain difficulties, and, on the other, the advantages of his creative work. He encounters difficulties in the very process of mastering the three arts, but once he has mastered them his power to influence the spectator is much greater and variegated than that of a dramatic actor. All the three arts mastered by the singer must be united and directed at the achievement of one single goal. The result will be negative if one of these arts impresses the audience and the others spoil the impression. What this boils down to is that one art will be destroying what the other is creating.

As Argon in Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* (1913)

Most opera singers evidently do not know this simple truth. Many of them are insufficiently interested in the musical side of their profession. As regards the stage side, many of them, far from studying it, treat it with disdain, as if priding themselves on being *singers,* and not just dramatic actors. This, however, does not prevent them from admiring Chaliapin, who is a wonderful example of how these three arts can be blended on the stage.[74]

Most of the singers only think of a well-taken note. They need sound for the sake of sound, a good note for the sake of a good note.

Most of the singers, who take such an attitude to the opera, are ignorant of musical and dramatic culture. Many of them come to the Opera Studio only to learn how to move on the stage, to find out "how this or that rôle is played" and to go through the repertoire, i.e., with the aid of the accompanist, to learn by heart a few arias and *mises-en-scène* which they can then use in their "concerts," or to use it, the studio, to get into the Bolshoi Theatre.

It is self-evident that it was not for such people that the studio was set up. Its chief aim was not only to improve the vocal culture of an opera singer, but his musical and stage culture too. We had therefore to organize studies in *all* the three arts necessary for the singer.

In the vocal sphere, apart from the singing itself and the style of performance, we paid special attention to diction and pronunciation. Singers, just like any other people, do not know how to speak beautifully and grammatically. That is why in most cases their beautiful singing is spoilt by extremely poor diction and pronunciation. Very often in singing the words are lost. And yet, the words are the theme of the composer's creation, while music is his creation, i.e., the element with the aid of which he brings out the given theme, his attitude to the theme. The word in this case represents *what* and music is *how*. The theme of the creation should be clear to anyone listening to the opera and not only when it is a solo, but when it is a trio, a sextette or a whole chorus.

In the sphere of diction opera presents many difficulties that are connected with vocal training, diapason and the orchestral accompaniment that drowns out the words. A singer must know how to "drown out" the orchestra. And for that it is necessary to know certain diction methods.

I am not a specialist in the sphere of music. So I could do nothing but try to bring the studio into contact with an institution with old musical traditions. Despite all that is said of it, the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre is just that sort of an institution. I made use of the close ties that had formed themselves naturally between the Opera Studio and the Bolshoi Theatre. We had similar ties with the Moscow Art Theatre, which I represented in the studio.

Thus, in the field of music the studio made use of the age-old culture of the Bolshoi Theatre and in the field of acting it availed itself of the culture of the Art Theatre.

To improve acting in opera it was necessary to reconcile the conductor, the stage director and the singer, who had always treated each other with animosity because each wanted to be first in the theatre. No one argues that in the opera theatre music and the composer play the most important part and that is why it is music more than anything else that directs and guides the stage director. However, this does not mean that the musical side of the show, headed by the conductor, should stifle the stage side, headed by the director. What it means is that the latter, i.e., the stage side, should match the musical side, help it, attempt to convey in plastic form the emotions of which music speaks, to explain it through acting.

Singers make a mistake when they use the introduction to an aria to clear their nose or throat before they begin to sing, instead of living through and grasping the meaning of the music. From the very first bar the singers and the orchestra join forces for collective creation. When action is clearly reflected in the accompaniment, it is necessary to convey it plastically. This applies just as much to the overtures to various acts which express in music what is to take place on the stage. Our Opera Studio is experimenting with overtures played after the curtain has gone up, with the participation of the artistes.

Just like the spoken word, stage action must be musical. Movement should be continuous, it should stretch out like a note on a string instrument and break off, when necessary, like the staccato of a coloratura soprano. Movement has its own legato, staccato, fermato, andante, allegro, piano, forte, etc. The tempo and rhythm of action must accord with the music. How is one to explain that this simple truth has not yet been grasped by opera singers? Most of them sing in one tempo and rhythm, walk in another, gesticulate in a third and feel in a fourth. Can this hodge-podge create harmony, without which there is no music and which above all demands order? To achieve a harmony of music, singing, speech and action, one needs more than outer, physical tempo and rhythm; one needs inner, spiritual tempo and rhythm. One must feel them in the sound, in the speech, in the action, in the gesture, in the movement, in fact, in the entire production.

As Argan in Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid* (1913)

I did quite a bit of work in this sphere and I think that I have achieved good results.

It was in accordance with the general tasks of the Opera Studio that I prepared a programme for my "system" and worked out a technique for portraying emotions, as well as a system of diction, plastics, rhythm, etc. I did everything to give my pupils practical knowledge–theory was just to help them to perfect what they had mastered. For this purpose I invented various exercises for the "system," rhythm, etc., as applicable to the opera.

I managed to knock together an excellent staff of teachers and instructors. For instance, the vocal section was headed by the well-known Margarita Gukova, a former *prima donna* of the Bolshoi Theatre, and Alexander Bogdanovich of the same theatre. Besides them we had Yevgenia Zbruyeva and Vasily Petrov, both of them Merited Artistes of the Republic. The musical part was in the hands of Nikolai Golovanov, conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre, who was succeeded by Vyacheslav Sook, a People's Artiste of the Republic, who held the post until his death. Then we have two instructors from the Moscow Conservatoire, Ivan Sokolov and Lev Mironov. Our diction instructors were Sergei Volkonsky (the laws of speech) and the late Nikolai

Safonov (the word in vocal art). Dances and plastics were taught by Alexander Pospekhin, a member of the Bolshoi ballet company. My assistants in the class of "system" and rhythm were two persons with whom I launched out on my stage career in my youth–my sister Zinaida Sokolova and my brother Vladimir Alexeyev, who returned to their true love, art.

I not only taught in the Opera Studio, but learned too, attending the lessons given by Gukova and Bogdanovich, the musical rehearsals of Golovanov, the classes headed by Pospekhin, Safonov and especially Volkonsky. I went enthusiastically with our young pupils through the latter's entire course and I am grateful to him and to all the other instructors for the knowledge they imparted. It helped me tremendously in my quest in the sphere of speech and sound.

Financial and other considerations compelled me to hurry up with my pupils' début. First we staged a few scenes from Rimsky-Korsakov's operas: the prologue to *Pskovityanka,* the prologue to *Tsar Saltan,* a scene from *Christmas Eve,* etc. Then we produced, in full, Massenet's *Werther* and Chaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin.*

In this work I found it necessary to start another quest in the field of production possibilities on the stage.

The Opera Studio was housed in an old mansion and we had a small hall in which to stage all the seven scenes of Chaikovsky's opera with its choruses and two balls. There was another hindrance: the little hall was divided by a thick, though architecturally beautiful arch with four columns, such as were typical of Pushkin's and Onegin's time. It would have been rank barbarism to destroy them, so we decided to include them in the production, in the *mises-en-scène.*

In the first scene the columns and the arch were used for the terrace of Larins' house. In the second scene they formed an alcove, typical of the time, in which we put Tatiana's bed. In the third scene they made together with a trellis the summer-house where Onegin has a rendez-vous with Tatiana. In the fourth scene, between the columns, we put a staircase leading to Larins' dance hall. In the fifth scene we covered the columns with a material made to resemble the bark of pines on the edge of the wood where the duel takes place. In the sixth scene the columns formed a box and the place of honour at the ball given by General Gremin, etc. The columns were thus the core around which we planned our scenery and staged the play. They became a part of the studio's emblem.

Staged in such conditions, the play demanded true-to-life acting from the actors. Lack of space compelled the singers to stand in one place and to resort more than usual to mimetics, eyes, words, plastics and movements and gestures.

From the artistic and pedagogical point of view this was very useful, for it imposed on the actors the necessity of taking recourse to subtle expressive methods and developed their restraint. The chamber nature of our presentation and the unusual acting of the singers made our studio production both original and attractive. I shall try to describe a few scenes to show the atmosphere of the opera.

The curtain went up to a piano overture, revealing–two steps away from the first row–an elevated terrace built on the floor, on the same floor where the spectators sat. One could feel the massiveness and solidity of the wall and arch representing Larina's house. The lighting effects and shades that fall on the genuine architectural designs bring life to the scene. The setting sun, the chorus heard from afar as the peasants return from work, the melancholy figures of two old women, Larina and the nurse, as they sit reminiscing–all this helped to create a picture of rural serenity in which Tatiana falls in love with Onegin at first sight.

In the second scene we made the actress playing Tatiana spend the entire scene with the letter in bed instead of walking up and down the proscenium and gesticulating operatically as it had been done before. The actress had to put in a lot of work and show considerable restraint in playing in this position and this switched the attention of the spectators from outer portrayal to the inner motives of the scene in which rude gestures and movements were substituted by rhythmic acting with the aid of mimetics and polished gestures. This delicate picture and music harmonized to make the scene exquisite, as Pushkin and Chaikovsky visualized it.

In the scene of the ball at the Larins', with its characteristically picturesque music, we succeeded in blending natural movements with rhythm. The most important element of this scene is the quarrel between Lensky and Onegin, which leads to the fatal duel in the next scene. In ordinary opera productions, this, the most important, part of the scene is usually shoved into the background by the hustle and bustle of the ball. To avoid this, we brought the leading characters on to the proscenium and moved the guests, who together with Triquet at first occupied the places around a table on the forestage, into the rear, behind the columns, where they dance and form a sort of a background for the dramatic development of the opera.

Although later the Opera Studio moved to bigger premises, we continued to stage *Eugene Onegin* in the same manner, as far as the scenery was concerned. In our subsequent productions, however, we had more freedom with regard to planning.

I had hesitated quite a bit before accepting the leadership of the Opera Studio. Later, seeing how useful it was for me in my profession, I realized that music and singing would help me to find a way out of the blind alley into which my quest had brought me.

Unwittingly, I became attracted to music and vocal art because in this field there are ample opportunities for the development of technique and virtuosity. It is enough for a good singer to sing one note and one feels that here is a specialist, here are culture and art. Indeed, before a man can produce with his voice a beautiful, noble and musical sound, the drawn-out note I dreamed of then for the dramatic actor, he has to go through a lengthy preliminary process of training and exercising his voice. One certainly gets aesthetic pleasure when a well-trained singer renders a musical composition well.

It was this desire to learn the foundations of art and to master it, on the one hand, and aversion to dilettantism, on the other, that impelled me to work in the studio not just for the sake of drama, but for the sake of opera too. But here, too, I encountered, and will probably continue to encounter, disappointments. For the sound of the singer is as much an insurmountable evil as is the dilettantism of dramatic actors. The singer, into whose throat nature has invested its capital, has a psychology all his own. He considers himself the Chosen One, one that cannot be replaced, and therefore forms an exaggerated opinion of his artistic merits. He wants everything from art without giving it anything. That is why after his very first success, brought about thanks to the hard work put in by the stage director and the singing master, a singer with a good voice can be lured away by any entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs are the worst enemies of our art, its exploiters, sharks that swallow young artistic shoots before they have had time to bloom and bear fruit, and they prey on young singers. And then, a few years later, after having squeezed them dry, they throw them out as unwanted.

There is no possibility of fighting this evil openly, it seems. The only way of combating it is by raising singers' general and artistic cultural level and educating them along these lines.

DEPARTURE AND RETURN

AFTER THREE YEARS' separation, our colleagues who had been cut off from Moscow by Civil War fighting returned home —not all of them, true, but the most talented.

It took some time to knock our divided troupe together again and to achieve the team-work that had characterized it before. We worked in conditions that were anything but favourable, for the revolutionary storm in the theatre was at its apogee and the attitude to our theatre was quite hostile, not on the part of the government which protected us, but on the part of the extreme Leftist section of the younger generation on the stage. Among them were new people, with new demands, ideals, dreams, people who were talented, impatient and self-conceited. Again, as in our time, the old was considered outdated and unwanted simply because it was old, and the new was splendid because it was new.

The task set our theatre by the times proved too difficult for our sluggish stage art. Once again, as always in such cases, trailing behind other arts and hastening to catch up with those that had outpaced it, our stage art was forced to jump, missing the important phases of development that are necessary for the normal growth of an artist. One cannot skip steps with impunity when these steps lead us gradually and naturally to art.

It was an exact repetition, but on a much greater scale, of what had happened during the first years of the Moscow Art Theatre when, just as it is now, our theatre was going through a revolution, which was pushing it to the next phase of its unending path. However, there was one essential difference.

In our time fate sent us Anton Chekhov, who painted an expressive picture of the life of his era.

The tragedy of the present-day theatrical revolution, which is greater in scope and more complicated, is that its dramatist is as yet unborn. And this when our collective creation begins with the dramatist. Without him the actors and the stage director can do nothing.

This, it seems, is something our revolutionary innovators do not want to reckon with. And this, naturally, leads to many mistakes and misunderstandings that push art on to a false outer path.

If there were a play that would truthfully depict the soul and life of the modern man—be it impressionistic, realistic or futuristic in form, the actors, stage directors and spectators would jump at it and seek for the best way of embodying it for the sake of its inner spiritual content. This spiritual content is deep and important, for it was created by suffering, by struggle and heroic feats, amidst unprecedentedly cruel catastrophes, famine and revolutionary struggle.

This big spiritual life cannot be expressed simply by sharp outer form, nor can it be incarnated by acrobatics, constructivism, gaudy luxury and splendour of production, by picturesque posters and futuristic boldness, or, on the contrary, by simplicity that goes so far as to deny scenery, by false noses, exaggerated make-up, new outward methods and over-acting which are usually justified by the fashionable word "grotesque."

Only a great actor—an actor of tremendous talent, force and technique—can portray great feelings and passions. He will come from the soil, as Shchepkin did in his time, and, like Shchepkin, he will embody all that is best, all that age-old culture and artistic technique has given. Without it the new actor will be powerless to portray world aspirations and man's calamities. Naked ingenuousness and intuition without technique will break the actor body and soul when he portrays the great passions and emotions of the modern soul. And while waiting for the new Dramatist and Artiste it would be best to raise the backward inner technique of acting art to the level achieved in the sphere of outer technique. This is a difficult, long and systematic job.

The revolutionaries, however, are impatient. That is one of their peculiarities. Just as in our time, new life does not want to wait. It demands quick results, victory, a speedy tempo. Without waiting for natural inner evolution, the innovators violate art, the creativeness of actors, of the playwright. And since the new dramatist has not yet been born, they are tackling the old classics who spoke of great people and great feelings, and are reshaping them, endowing them with the sharp outer form that is so necessary for the modern spectator. In their enthusiasm, the innovators have mistaken the new outer form for a renovated inner content. Such misunderstandings are quite common when things are done in a hurry. And what happened here was a repetition of what had happened to us, only in reverse. In our struggle against conventionalities we mistook outer interpretation of life for a new art; the innovators and theatrical revolutionaries of today, in their struggle against that, have become infatuated with conventionalities.

Modernization of classics, however, has not brought any serious results. And that is quite understandable. It is impossible to change the old, yet ever young, Pushkin into Mayakovsky, just as it is impossible to turn Kramskoi into Tatlin, Glinka into Stravinsky and Davydov into Ferdinandov or Tseretelli.

Attempting to modernize the old classics, the theatrical revolutionaries at the same time tried to get along without a dramatist. They staged scenic spectacles on any theme. They showed theatricality for the sake of theatricality, sought to stun the audiences by spectacular productions, acting tricks and variety, or used political, social or other themes and presented them in new, piquant and sometimes talented artistic forms.

Sometimes their shows pursued useful utilitarian aims, with players portraying scientific or other achievements. At one time, for instance, malaria was rampant and it was necessary to popularize methods of fighting it. A ballet was staged for this purpose, showing a traveller falling asleep near a reedy swamp. The reeds were beautiful half-naked women. The traveller is bitten by a mosquito and goes into a feverish dance. Then a doctor comes, gives the sick man some quinine and the dance gradually becomes normal.

There were also attempts to use the ballet to popularize technical achievements, to show how looms and other machinery worked.

To popularize ethics scenes were staged in realistic surroundings of trials of alleged criminals, such as writers, priests, prostitutes, etc.

If the theatre is capable of fulfilling not only artistic tasks, but utilitarian as well, then it becomes more useful and we should rejoice in its many-sided activity. But it would be wrong to mistake tendencies or useful knowledge, which are sometimes claimed to be the foundation of the new theatre, for creativeness which lies at the bottom of every art. An ordinary spectacle, sermon or agitation should not be mistaken for real art.

In the field of acting, while waiting for the emergence of a new talent who would satisfy the demands of the time, they went for the new just because it was new, without considering whether or not it accorded with the basic tasks of art.

In the absence of an *artiste,* who could speak of big feelings even if it be in old classical plays, in the absence of the necessary prerequisites which permit incarnation of human emotions and develop the actor's creative technique, they grabbed, as we had done in our time, at what was more accessible to the eye and ear, i.e., the outer form, the body, plastics, movements, voice, declamation with the aid of which they tried to create a sharp form of scenic interpretation.

And here too, in their over-enthusiasm for the outward, many decided that emotions and psychology were typical attributes of bourgeois art, 'and that proletarian art should be based on the actor's physical culture. More. The old acting methods, based on the organic laws of creative nature, were considered realistic and, therefore, out of fashion as far as new art was concerned–the art of conventional outer form. The cult of this form is backed by widespread opinion that the new kind of stage art accords with the tastes of and is understood by the new proletarian spectator who requires absolutely new methods of acting and new means of expression.

But can it be that the present-day subtlety of the outer artistic form was engendered by the primitive taste of the proletarian and not by the epicurism and refinement of the spectator of the former, bourgeois culture? Isn't the modern "grotesque" the result of satiety–like in the old Russian saying that "too much good food makes cabbage attractive"?

Judging by theatre attendances, the proletarian spectator likes plays which can make him laugh and cry with real tears. He does not need a refined form, but real human feelings expressed in simple and understandable, but strong and convincing form. In art, as in his food, he is not accustomed to piquant delicacies that stimulate appetite. He is spiritually hungry and wants simple, nutritive food for his soul. And in our art it is this food that is most difficult to prepare.

It is unfortunate that the sapid simplicity of rich imagination is the most difficult thing in our art and that it is feared and avoided by all those who have not mastered our acting art.

I can only hope for an early end to the dangerous and harmful prejudice that outer art and outer acting are necessary for the proletarian.

People propagating the new credo of the modern theatre, i.e., form for the sake of form and outer technique for the sake of technique, came out daily with new theses, principles, systems and methods. For the sake of this propaganda they read lectures and arranged discussions. One principle would be affirmed one week only to be replaced with a diametrically opposite principle the following week. This unnatural haste and tempo of the quest for the new led to many an anecdote. For instance, before the Revolution there was a provincial actor who played in an Ostrovsky play. After the October Revolution everything changed. The new stage director produced the same play with the same actor, but gave it a new trend. At the end of the season the actor played the same rôle in another town under another stage director, who set him another different task. Thus, in the course of one season the same actor played the same rôle according to three different principles. Could Tommaso Salvini himself or Maria Yermolova display such talented variety?

It was tantamount to asking a painter like Repin to paint three pictures in eight months: one *à la* Repin, one *à la* Gauguin and one *à la* Malevich!

This is just about what was happening in the theatrical world at the time our colleagues returned to Moscow.

With the atmosphere being so confused, was it possible to reorganize our temporarily divided troupe and outline new perspectives and new paths for our art?

Just like 17 years before that, before our first trip abroad in 1906, we found ourselves in an impasse. It was necessary to take a look at the whole picture from a distance in order to see how things really were. In short, it was necessary to leave Moscow for a while. It was for this reason that we decided to take advantage of the offers we had been receiving from Europe and America and left on a tour that lasted from September 1922 to August 1924.[75]

Nemirovich-Danchenko could not go on this interesting trip because he had to remain in Moscow with the rest of our company and the Musical Studio he had established at the Moscow Art Theatre.

The size of the book affords no possibility of describing our tour of

America. It just cannot be told on a few pages. Moreover, a story of our tour would lead from the line I had adopted—that of describing my creative quest and the evolution of art. During our travels this line was naturally temporarily abandoned, for it is impossible to go on with experiments in railway carriages and hotel rooms. Nevertheless, I made new and important discoveries in the sphere of sound and speech, discoveries that were of considerable interest to me at that time. I shall say a few words about them.

It all started in Berlin where, as a result of intensified rehearsals and work as stage director and actor, as well as of the numerous speeches I had to make as a representative of our theatre, my voice gave in. Hoarseness, with the ensuing weakness of sound and tendency to feel tired, hindered me in my work. Ahead was the lengthy American tour which, according to our contract, called for a heavy schedule. My concern for the voice compelled me to take up daily exercises in vocalization, like the ones advised long ago by old man Komissarzhevsky and later by the singers Gukova and Bogdanovich at the Bolshoi Theatre Opera Studio which I headed. Hotel environments, however, were not conducive to such work. There were times when some nervous neighbour would knock on the wall and at others I would feel ashamed myself lest someone was listening to my awful singing. All this forced me to do the exercises at half-tone, and that proved very beneficial for the voice. Every day for two years I worked systematically on my voice and succeeded in strengthening it: the hoarseness passed and I played for two American and European seasons, in addition to taking part in the morning rehearsals and making speeches at the various parties and receptions given in our honour. What is more important is that I liked work on my voice and understood (i.e., felt) that it was of great practical and artistic significance for the actor.

Singing taught me to speak naturally, meaningfully and nobly. In this difficult sphere I have not achieved my goal; perhaps I cannot achieve it. Nevertheless, my work has shown me much that I can pass on to the younger generation.

All this was the result of the search I had started in the Opera Studio.

On our return home after our two-year foreign tour, we found many changes in Moscow and much in them astounded me. To begin with, creative life in the theatre, the impoverishment of the spectator and poor attendances in most theatres notwithstanding, seemed extremely brisk compared to the West where it was still quite stagnant after World War I.

Unfortunately, I cannot deviate from the line I had adopted to speak of the splendid shows Nemirovich-Danchenko staged in our absence at the Moscow Art Theatre together with his Musical Studio. In this book about "my life in art" I can touch on music only inasmuch as it directly influenced my artistic development. As regards other theatres, I was surprised to see that many of the experiments, of which we had seen only the outlines before our departure, were now bringing results. It may be said that we now have all sorts of theatres: agitational, with political satire and tendencies; revues with bold and talented stage tricks on the American pattern; the so-called newspaper and *feuilleton* theatres whose plays are based on current events; experimental theatres; and synthetic theatres which do not invent anything themselves, but which know how to adapt the best there is in other theatres. The new art makes perfect use of the splendid architectural and sculptural principle, of constructivism and stage space. There is no theatre that does not do so. The grotesque in the scenery, costumes and productions is sharply, and sometimes skilfully and artistically, emphasized. Bold make-up with golden or silver hair, the futuristic manner of painting faces, cardboard props and sculptural details have been accepted by almost all the theatres.

Many of the stage problems we had been long facing have now been solved. One of the most popular principles of production has been introduced by Vsevolod Meierhold. He boldly shows the seamy side of the stage, which had always been concealed from the spectator. In his theatre the stage is open on all sides. It is not separated from the auditorium and the two form one whole, in the depth of which, against a background of screens, the actors perform the play. They are brightly illuminated in the semi-darkness and are therefore the only light spot and object for the spectators' eyes. Thus simply yet extremely skilfully Meierhold has put an end once and for all to the theatrical portal which hampers the actor and the stage director in certain plays. The portal of the stage is too big and the frame it forms dwarfs the actor and oppresses him. Attempts to avoid that with the aid of decorative cloth and flies made things worse, for they diverted the spectator's attention from the actor. In Meierhold's theatre there is neither portal nor arch that have to be covered with cloth. The spectator does not see it and therefore concentrates his attention on what the stage director wants to show him, be it a small screen or any other object.

I was frankly surprised by the many major achievements in the field of expressive technique. There is no doubt that we now have a new type of actor, so far with a small "a": the actor-acrobat, singer, dancer, reciter, plastic, pamphleteer, wit, orator, master of ceremonies, political agitator all rolled in one. The new actor can do anything: sing a couplet or a love song, recite a poem or a monologue, play a piano or a violin or football, dance foxtrot, turn somersaults, stand and walk on his hands, perform in tragedy or vaudeville. Of course, he is not an expert in all this, just a dilettante, for a real clown can naturally turn somersaults better, a real dancer, even from the *corps de ballet*, can dance better, and a real pianist or violinist can play better on these instruments than the actor.

Nevertheless, the actor's multiform patterns of movement, flexibility of body and balance, diction and the whole expressive apparatus, all of which is so necessary for the theatre, have of late brought excellent results, as has the production side in the theatre. One is astonished by the amount of ingenuity, talent, variety, boldness, wit, resourcefulness, taste and knowledge of the stage displayed by all the innovators and inventors. I eulogize them, but with one reservation.

So long as the physical culture of the body assists the main creative tasks of art, i.e., *to convey human emotions in an artistic form,* I welcome wholeheartedly the new expressive achievements of the contemporary actor. But the moment physical culture becomes an end in itself in art, the moment it begins to slow down the creative process and engenders a split between spiritual desire and conventions of external acting, the moment it suppresses feelings and experiences, I become an ardent opponent of these fine new achievements.

Why is it that the new theatre, despite the success of outer search, looks so outworn and old? Why does one feel so bored in it?

Is it not because modern art is not *eternal,* but only fashionable?

Or perhaps because the outer stage production possibilities are extremely limited and are therefore doomed to be repetitive which, naturally, is boring?

If one looks attentively, one will see that new art is making use of the same old stage possibilities that we had used in the past: the same platforms, screens, drapery, black velvet, the extreme Leftist painting methods with

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1912)

which we concealed outdated acting art. This shows that the external production possibilities have evidently been used to the full and that there is nothing new one can seek for in this sphere.

The new is now created out of the good there was in the forgotten old, which is presented in new combinations.

Then why is one so bored in the new theatre?

Is it not because the external, however beautiful and sharp in form, cannot live on the stage by itself? The outward must be justified by emotion, and only then can it move the spectator. The misfortune of modern art is that while outward production and acting possibilities have been developed to the maximum and are completely exhausted, the inner creative possibilities have been completely forgotten. Moreover, they are flippantly refuted by the innovators, who ignore the fact that human nature cannot be changed and that the body cannot live without the soul.

And while in the sphere of external art, i.e., in the art of outer form, I was surprised by the major success scored by the new actor, in the sphere of inner, spiritual creation I was disappointed by a fundamentally different phenomenon.

The new theatre has not produced a single actor-creator who is strong in portraying human emotion, nor has it worked out a single new method, instituted anything resembling a search in the sphere of inner technique or built up any brilliant ensemble. In a word, there is not a single achievement in the sphere of spiritual creativeness.

I was astonished that along with the new scenic form there returned to the actors the completely outworn methods of soulless acting, inherited from the old French melodrama and "vampuka."

But the old actor of our grandmother's time was an expert in the use of the methods he had inherited from age-old culture. The actor today uses outworn methods like a dilettante.

How is one to explain that the sharp outer form of modern art has been filled with old acting trash that is being naïvely served as something new?

The reason is plain. I have spoken of it in this book time and again: nature strikes back with a vengeance at those who violate it.

It is enough to set an actor a creative task that is beyond his abilities and thus call forth constraint, and feeling immediately hides in fear and pushes forward crude trade tricks and stencils. And the harder the tasks faced by the actor, the more primitive, naïve and crude his stock in trade becomes. It must be borne in mind that the tasks given the actor today are extremely difficult and variegated. First, he must justify the bold, sharp and even daring artistic form of the production and outer acting. For this he needs a perfect inner technique that will enable him to live his part, and the modern actor hasn't got it. Second, one must know how to modernize old dramatists or com-

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Isn't it time to think of the danger now facing art and of returning its soul to it—even if this has to be done at the expense of the beautiful outer form that has replaced the old?

It is now necessary to stimulate as quickly as possible the spiritual culture and technique of the actor and to raise it to the level of his physical culture. Only then will the new form receive the necessary inner basis and justification, without which it is lifeless and loses its right to existence.

This work, of course, will be incomparably more complicated and longer. It is far more difficult sharply to define feelings and experiences than the outer form of embodiment. But the theatre is in greater need of spiritual creativeness and it is therefore necessary to tackle the job without delay. How is it to be done and what will my part be in this new job?

RESULTS AND THE FUTURE

I AM NOT YOUNG, and my life in art is approaching its last act. The time has come to sum up the results and to draw up a plan of my last endeavour in art. Partially, my work as a stage director and as an actor has been in the field of outer production; mainly, it has been in the sphere of spiritual creativeness.

First, I shall deal with the outer, productive capacities and achievements of the theatre which I myself have witnessed.

Having tried all the means and methods of creative work in the theatre; having been enthusiastic about all sorts of productions along the costume drama, symbolic, ideological and other lines; having mastered production forms of various artistic tendencies–realistic, naturalistic, futuristic, statuary, schematized, exaggeratedly simple, with drapes, screens, tulle, and all sorts of lighting tricks, I have come to the conclusion that all these things do not constitute the background that the actor needs to show his creativeness in full. And while my quest in the past in the sphere of decorative and other productions had led me to the conclusion that our scenic capacities were extremely meagre, now I have to admit that they have been completely exhausted.

The only lord and ruler on the stage is the talented actor. But I have never succeeded in finding for him the scenic background which would not interfere with, but help his complex artistic work. What we need is a simple background, but this simplicity must be the result of a rich, and not poor, imagination. Unfortunately, I don't know how to prevent the simplicity engendered by a rich imagination from being even more conspicuous than over-luxurious theatricality. The simplicity of screens, drapes, velvet, rope scenery (like the one we used in *The Life of Man*, etc.) turned out to be the worst possible thing imaginable. It attracts more attention than ordinary scenery to which our eye is accustomed and which it is beginning not to notice. It only remains for us to hope that a great painter will come to solve this very difficult problem by creating a simple but artistic background for the actor.

But while we may safely claim that we have mastered all the methods in the sphere of outer production, the situation in the sphere of inner creativeness is entirely different. Here everything is dependent on talent and intuition, here in the overwhelming majority of cases pure dilettantism reigns supreme. The laws of acting have not been mastered, and many think that this would be unnecessary and even harmful.

There is an opinion, a very old one, that the actor needs only talent and inspiration. To support this opinion people refer to geniuses like our Mochalov who, they say, proves it by his artistic life. Neither do they forget Kean–as he is depicted in the well-known melodrama. Try to tell actors who are poorly acquainted with their art that technique is also necessary, and they will shriek with indignation:

"What! Then you deny talent and inspiration?"

There is another opinion, very widespread in our profession–that the thing most needed is technique, and so far as talent is concerned, of course, it is not in the way. Actors of this ilk, when they hear you recognize technique, will at first applaud you. But if you try to tell them that technique is all right so far as it goes, but that talent, inspiration, superconsciousness and living the part are more important and that it is for such actors that technique is created, that it consciously serves to rouse the creative mood, they will be horrified by your words.

"Living the part?" they will shout. "Why, that's outdated!"

Is it not because these people are afraid of genuine emotion and of living their part on the stage that they do not know how to feel or live the part?

Nine-tenths of an actor's work, nine-tenths of everything lies in feeling the rôle spiritually, in living it. When this is done, the rôle is almost ready. It is senseless to bank on simple accident. Let exceptional talents feel and create their rôles at once. Laws are not written for them; it is they who write them. But what is most astounding is that I have never heard them say that technique is unnecessary and that only talent is, or that technique comes first and talent second. On the contrary, the greater the actor, the more he is interested in the technique of his art.

"The greater the talent, the more development and technique it needs," one great actor once told me. "It is unpleasant to hear people with small voices yell or sing falsetto; it is terrible when this is done by a singer like Tamagno with his defeaning voice."

So spoke a man of real talent.

All great actors write about their technique. All of them to the end of their days develop and strengthen their technique with singing, fencing, gymnastics, sports, etc. For years they study the psychology of a rôle and polish it spiritually. Only home-baked geniuses boast of their intimacy with Apollo, their all-embracing inner fire. They inspire themselves with alcohol, stimulate themselves with narcotics and prematurely wear out their temperament, ability and talent. Can anyone tell me why a violinist–no matter what his place in the orchestra–must exercise for hours every day? Why must a dancer daily train every one of his muscles? Why do the painter and the sculptor work every day and why do they consider the day utterly lost if they don't? Then why is it that some claim that a dramatic actor can do nothing, spend his days in a café with charming ladies and hope for Apollo's inspiration and protection in the evening? Now, honestly, what kind of an art is it when its priests speak like amateurs?

There is no art that does not demand virtuosity, and there is no limit to this virtuosity. The wonderful French painter Edgar Degas once said:

"If you have a hundred thousand francs' worth of skill, spend another five sous to buy more."

This necessity to acquire experience and skill is especially apparent in theatrical art. Indeed, the tradition of painting is preserved in museums and art galleries; the tradition of literary art in books; the wealth of musical forms in scores. A young painter can stand for hours before a picture, gradually perceiving the colour of Titian, the harmony of Velásquez, the drawing of Ingres. One can read and re-read the inspired lines of Dante and the finished pages of Flaubert. It is possible to examine every curve in the works of Bach and Beethoven. But a work of art born on the stage lives only for a moment, and no matter how beautiful it may be it cannot be ordered to stop.

The tradition of stage art lives only in the talent and the ability of the actor. The impossibility of repeating the impression received by the spectator restricts the rôle of the theatre as a place where stage art may be studied. In this sense the theatre cannot give the beginner what the library and the museum give the young writer or artist. It would be possible, in this age of scientific progress, to try to record the voices of dramatic actors and film their gestures and mimetics and this would greatly assist young actors. But nothing can fix and pass on to our descendants those inner paths of feeling, that conscious road to the gates of the unconscious, which alone are the true foundation of theatrical art. This is the sphere of living tradition. This is a torch which can be passed only from hand to hand, and not from the stage; through instruction, through the revelation of mysteries, on the one hand, and exercises and stubborn and inspired effort to grasp these mysteries, on the other.

The main difference between the art of the actor and all other arts is that other artists may create whenever they are inspired. The stage artiste, however, must be the master of his own inspiration and must know how to call it forth at the time announced on the theatre's posters. This is the chief secret of our art. Without this the most perfect technique, the greatest gifts, are powerless. And this secret, unfortunately, is very jealously guarded. With but few exceptions, the great masters of the stage not only did not try to disclose this secret to their younger comrades, but kept it behind an impenetrable curtain. The absence of this tradition doomed our art to dilettantism. The inability to find a conscious path to unconscious creativeness led actors to disastrous prejudices which deny inner, spiritual technique. They became stagnant and mistook empty theatrical self-consciousness for true inspiration.

Among the thoughts that have reached us are those of Shakespeare, Molière, the Riccobonis (father and son), Lessing, the great Schröder, Goethe, Talma, Coquelin, Irving, Salvini and other law-makers in our art. But all these valuable thoughts and advices have not been systematized and classified, and for that reason lack of firm foundations in our art, which could guide instructors in their work, remains a fact. In Russia, which has assimilated all that the West has given her and created a national art all her own, lack of firm foundations which could fix it is even more obvious. We have heaps of articles, books, lectures and papers on art; we have the research work done by our innovators; but apart from some notes by Gogol and a few lines from Shchepkin's letters we have nothing that is practically necessary and suitable for the actor when he is in the midst of his creative effort, nothing that can guide the instructor when he teaches his pupils. All that has been written about the theatre is pure philosophy–sometimes very interesting, aptly describing the results which it is desirable to achieve in art–or criticism which discusses the usefulness or uselessness of the results achieved.

All these works are valuable and necessary, but not for practical uses, for they say nothing of how final results are to be achieved, of what one is to do with beginners in the first, second or third stage of instruction, or, on the contrary, with an over-experienced and spoiled actor. What solfeggio exercises does he need? What scale and arpeggio does an actor require to develop his creative mood and to live his part? These exercises should be numbered, as problems are numbered in the arithmetic book, and practised systematically in school and at home. But the books and treatises on the theatre say nothing of this. There is, in fact, no handbook. There are only attempts to create one, but it is either too early to speak of them or they are not worth being spoken of.

In the field of practical instruction there are some oral directions that have come down to us from Shchepkin and his successors, who mastered their art by intuition, but who did not test it scientifically and did not systematize their discoveries. It is obvious that there can be no system of creating inspiration, just like there cannot be a system of playing a violin like a genius or singing like Chaliapin. They have been endowed with the most important thing that comes from Apollo, but there is something, small but important, that is equally necessary and compulsory both for Chaliapin and the ordinary chorister, for both Chaliapin and the ordinary chorister have lungs, a respiratory system, nerves and physical organism–even though better developed in one than in the other–whose task it is to produce sound according to a law common to all people. In the sphere of rhythm, plastics, the laws of speech, as well as in the field of voice training and breathing, there is much that is similar and therefore incumbent upon all. The same applies to the sphere of psychic, creative life, since all the actors without exception, partake of creative food according to the laws of nature, treasure what they receive in their intellectual, emotional or muscular memory, digest the material in their artistic imagination, give birth to the image and life of the human spirit, and incarnate it according to well-known, natural laws that are incumbent upon all. These creative laws that yield to our consciousness are not many. They do not play a very distinguished role, which is limited to professional tasks. Nevertheless, these laws of nature should be studied by every actor, for it is only with their aid that he can set in motion his superconscious creative apparatus, which will for ever remain a mystery to us. The more talented the actor is, the greater and more mysterious is this mystery and the more he needs the technical methods of creation that are accessible to consciousness to influence the superconscious concealed in its innermost recesses and thus call forth inspiration.

These elementary psycho-physical and psychological laws have so far not been mastered. There is no information about them, no research into them and no practical exercises based on this research–problems, solfeggio, arpeggio, scale–that could be applied to our stage art, and this makes our art a chance impromptu, sometimes inspired, sometimes, on the contrary, degraded to an ordinary profession with its well-established tricks and stencils.

Do the actors really study their art and its nature? No, they only learn how a rôle is played and not how it is organically created. The actor's trade teaches him how to come out on to the stage and how to play. Real art should teach how to rouse in oneself the superconscious creative nature for superconscious organic creation.

Our next task and the next phase in our art will no doubt be to intensify our effort in the sphere of the actor's inner technique. What will my role be in this future task? Our position as representatives of the older generation of actors and of the so-called former bourgeois art has altered very much. We, the old artistic revolutionaries, now find ourselves in the Right wing of art and, as tradition will have it, the Leftists must attack us. After all, one must have enemies to attack. Our new rôles are not so attractive as our old ones were. I do not complain, I am only stating a fact. Every generation has its own limitations. It would be a sin to complain. We have lived, and what is more, we should thank our fate for letting us peep into the future, into what will come after us. We must try to understand those perspectives, that goal which the younger generation is seeking to achieve. It is very interesting to be able to live and watch what is going on in the minds and hearts of youth.

But in my new position I would like to avoid playing two roles. I am afraid of becoming a young old man who flatters youth and tries to look their age, to share their tastes and convictions, who tries to fawn upon them and who, notwithstanding his lack of wind, goes limping and stumbling, afraid that he might be left behind. But I do not want to play the other role either, a role that is the exact opposite of the first. I am afraid of becoming too experienced an old man, who has seen everything, who is impatient, irascible, opposed to everything that is new, forgetful of the researches and mistakes of his own youth.

In my last years of life I would like to be what I am in reality, what I must be on the strength of the laws of nature according to which I have lived and worked in art.

What am I and what do I represent in the new and nascent life of the theatre? Can I, as of old, fully understand all that goes on around me and all that enthuses youth?

I think that organically I can no longer understand much in the aspirations of present-day youth. One must have courage to admit this. You know from what I have told you how we were educated. Compare our life with the life of the present generation of youth brought up amidst the dangers and trials of the Revolution.

We spent our youth in a Russia that was peaceful; in which there was plenty for few. The present generation has grown up in the midst of war, hunger, world upheavals, transitional era, mutual misunderstanding and hate. We knew much joy and shared very little of it with those near to us, we are paying for our egotism. The new generation almost does not know the joy that we knew, it seeks and creates joy in new environments, and tries to make up for those years of youth that it has lost. It is not for us to condemn it for this. It is for us to sympathize with it, to follow with interest and good will the evolution of the new art and new life that is unrolling under the laws of nature.

But there is a sphere in which we have not grown too old. The longer we live, the more experienced and stronger we shall be in this sphere. Here we can still do a great deal and help youth with our knowledge and experience. What is more, in this sphere youth cannot get along without us unless it wants to rediscover an already discovered America. This is the sphere of inner and outer technique in our art that is incumbent upon all, the young and the old, Rightists and Leftists, men and women, the gifted and the giftless. Correct voice training, rhythmics, good diction are equally necessary for those who sang *God Save the Tsar* in the past and for those who sing the *Internationale* today. Fundamentally, the processes of stage creation remain the same for the younger generation as they were for the older. Incidentally, it is precisely in this sphere that young actors distort and maim their nature. We can help them, we can warn them in time.

There is yet another sphere in which we can be of use to young people. We know from our own experience the meaning of eternal art and the path outlined for it by nature, and from our own experience we also know the meaning of fashionable art and how short its life is. We have had an opportunity of convincing ourselves that it is very useful for a young man temporarily to turn from a beaten track, from the highway leading to a clear future on to a path, to roam freely, pluck flowers and fruits, in order later to return to the highway and progress. It would be dangerous, however, to stray completely from the road followed by art from time immemorial. For he who does not know this eternal road is doomed to endless wandering in impasses, along bypaths that lead to the wilderness and not to light and freedom.

How can I share with the younger generation the results of my experience and warn them against mistakes that are bred by inexperience? When I look back on the road I have traversed, on my life in art, I want to compare myself to a gold seeker who first has to roam the wilderness to find a streak of gold, then wash tons and tons of sand and rock to get a few grains of the valuable metal. And like a gold seeker, it is not my labours, my quest and privations, my joys and disappointments that I can bequeath to my descendants, but the gold vein that I had found.

This gold vein in my sphere of art, the result of my lifelong search, is my so-called "system," the method of acting that I have discovered and that allows the actor to create images, reveal the life of human spirit and naturally incarnate it in a beautiful artistic form on the stage.

I studied the laws of the actor's organic nature and made them the basis of my method. Its merit lies in the fact that it has nothing that I have invented myself or that I have not tested in practice, either on myself or on my pupils. This method is the natural result of my lifelong experience.

My "system" falls into two main parts: 1) the actor's inner and outer work on himself; 2) inner and outer work on the rôle. Inner work on oneself consists in developing psychic technique which enables the actor to work up a creative mood in which he finds inspiration. Outer work on oneself consists in preparing one's body apparatus to incarnate the rôle and fully bringing out its inner life. Work on a rôle consists in studying the spiritual content of the drama, the core around which it is built and which determines its meaning as well as the meaning of each of its rôles.

The most dangerous enemy of progress is prejudice, for it holds back and hampers development. In our art this prejudice is the opinion that defends the actor's dilettante attitude to his work. And it is this prejudice that I want to combat. But for that I can do only one thing: tell what I had learned during my stage career, in the form of dramatic grammar with practical exercises. Let people do them. The results will dissuade those who have got into an impasse of prejudice.

I intend to do that in my next book.[76]

APPENDIX

UNPUBLISHED CHAPTERS AND EXCERPTS

FROM THE CHAPTER "MUSIC"

MOSCOW LEARNED of the sad news of the death abroad of the talented Nikolai Rubinstein from a letter by Turgenev. It was in his arms that the great man died. His body was brought to Moscow for burial in March or April, at the time the snow was thawing and the streets were so dirty it was well-nigh impossible to walk in them. My cousin, then chairman of the Russian Musical Society and Conservatoire, asked me to assist them at the railway station and at the funeral. I was 17 at the time and this request flattered me. I must confess that I liked the idea of appearing in public as one of those in charge of the funeral of the famous musician. My job was to arrange and direct the deputations at the head of the procession. There were a great many things that required clarification–for instance, the route the procession was to take, and I kept running to my cousin who, as one of the chief mourners, walked behind the coffin at the very end of the procession. The distance was about half a mile, there were pools of water and my shoes were soaked through. Like the others, I was dead tired after accompanying the body from the station to the university church where it was to lie in state. The distance on the following day was much longer–about five miles, for Rubinstein was to be buried in a monastery cemetery outside the city. It was decided that we would go there on horseback. This decision made me extremely happy, for I loved riding. I had a beautiful horse of my own and I was sure that if I could get or make funereal harness and come in black with a crape band on my top hat, I would captivate everybody. The actor's love of showing off had obviously, and unfortunately, already taken hold of me.

On the following day, mounted on a beautiful steed, wearing black riding boots, a long black overcoat and a black top hat, I rode at the head of the funeral procession. With my horse prancing, I thought I looked splendid. As soon as the procession started, there appeared two gendarmes on either side of me, and it looked as if I had been arrested. That somewhat spoiled the effect.

"Who's that?" people lining up the streets asked. "That one in black, on the horse? The one between the two gendarmes?"

"Oh, that's probably the groom. And the horse probably belonged to the deceased. That's why he's riding it."

"No. He's probably the chief footman from the undertaker's."

Unaware of the impression I was creating and not suspecting that the others had cheated me and came on foot, I looked silly on the horse and for a long time was the target of jokes and cartoons. People called me "that one in black, on the horse."

This was not my first public fiasco, and I became famous.

FROM THE CHAPTER "PERSONAL SUCCESS"

The Village of Stepanchikovo

. . . We chose *The Tutor,* a very poor comedy by Dyachenko. Why? I must confess that in those days I was infatuated with the French theatre, particularly with the Comédie Française,* and dreamed of playing some rôle in French. But how to go about it? The rôle of the Tutor was half in broken Russian and half in French. Well, if one could not stage a whole play in French, one could play at least a part. By that time I had already learned how to speak broken Russian and had a pretty good pronunciation in French. Both these abilities would help me to create the necessary type. And that made me rehearse with enthusiasm. Moreover, I had accumulated enough material for the rôle in the days when I played in operettas and in a whole series of rôles of similar genre. French gestures, manner of bearing and typical methods had made a deep impression on my muscular, auricular and visual memory, and awaited application. Before that, playing in Russian, we tried to create the illusion of French speech and manner of bearing. It was all the easier to do that playing in French, which helped us to achieve the proper rhythm and tempo, the proper accentuation and the proper methods and tricks. I had been to many Parisian theatres, and I remembered all the intonations and inflections of the best Comédie Française actors. Moreover, I had an excellent live model in the face of a Frenchman, who was working in our factory office and with whom I became friends for that purpose. Thus, there was no lack of material for the rôle.

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* The oldest national theatre in France (established in 1680).

There has never been another rôle in which I have felt so free, so happy, so cheerful, so much at ease. I played the character without thinking of it because I felt it instinctively thanks to the proper creative mood which I had achieved on the stage. Perhaps, for the first time, the outer image came from within. Who knows, perhaps the French blood of my grandmother actress had made itself felt for the first time? There is no doubt that I succeeded in stressing all the characteristics of the rôle; there is no doubt that both the rôle and the play were extremely successful. I loved the rôle, playing it was a real pleasure and, obviously, I found the way out of the impasse and was on the right path.

FROM THE CHAPTER "OTHELLO"

. . . It appears that his [Salvini's] Othello was not Othello, but Romeo. He saw nothing but Desdemona, he thought of nothing but her, he trusted her completely, and we wondered how Iago could change this Romeo into the jealous Othello. How to explain Salvini's power of impression? Let me speak in images, it will be easier.

. . . Salvini's creation on the stage was a bronze monument. One part of it . . . he moulded perfectly in his monologue in the Senate scene. In other scenes and acts he moulded the other parts. Put together, they formed an immortal monument of human passion, of jealousy arising from Romeo-like love, complete trust, insulted love, noble horror and wrath, and inhuman revenge. . . . But we did not know that all these components were so clear, so definite, so perceptible, so easy to analyze. Salvini showed each part moulded in bronze. Before that they seemed vague, imperceptible, dim, as though dissolved in the transparent ether of our dreams. And how many more inexpressible, new, deeper and vague feelings and reminiscences this rough and heavy bronze created.

Salvini's Othello is a monument, a law into eternity that nothing can change.

K. D. Balmont once said: "One must create for all time, once and for ever."

It was precisely how Salvini created: for all time, once and for ever.

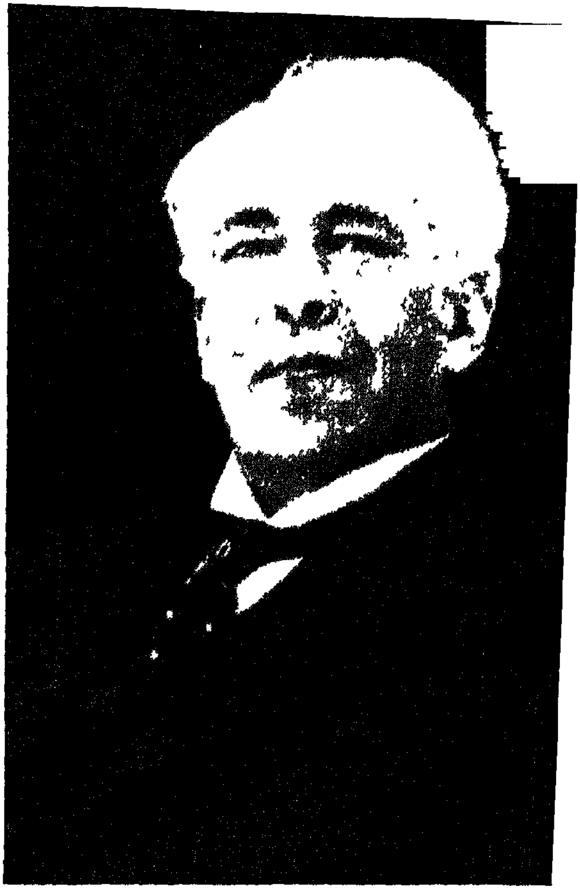
Having opened for a fleeting moment the gates of paradise in his monologue in the Senate scene, having shown us for a second, in his meeting with Desdemona, how trustful and boyishly in love a big, courageous, elderly soldier can be, Salvini intentionally opened the sublime gates of his art for a time. With one stroke he for ever won our trust, and we fell hungrily upon those parts which he ordered us to notice and remember.

There was only one place where he whipped us up, obviously so that we would not weaken our attention. That was in the Cyprus scene in which he gave short shrift to Cassio and Montano. His big eyes were so fierce, he raised his curved scimitar with such Oriental ease and swiftness, that we saw how dangerous it was to play with him and that Othello's arms had in seven years become accustomed to "action in the tented field."

We also saw why he said that "of this great world can I speak more than pertains to feats of broils and battle."

The curtain rose on third act. The scenery was of the most banal operatic design, in the old style of the Bolshoi Theatre. All this was disappointing until Salvini came out to admire and tell Desdemona of his love. Now they looked like two young lovers; now he looked like an old man tenderly caressing the hair of his grand-daughter; now like a good-humoured husband, born to be deceived by women. How he hated his affairs because that meant leaving Desdemona. . . . Their farewells were long, and their eyes were so expressive, and they made mysterious cabalistic signs to express their feelings. And then, when Desdemona left, Othello's gaze followed her and poor Iago found it hard to get the General to look at him. It seemed that today Iago would get nowhere with Othello because the latter was too much in love with Desde-

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1916)



mona. Looking sidewise at the papers, lazily playing with his goose-feather pen, Othello was in too good spirits to do any serious work. He wanted to be idle, so he chatted with Iago.

Have you ever seen a general waste his time with his orderly? The latter, being close to the family, knows all the secrets of his master. The latter does not stand on ceremony with him, but often heeds his opinion and advice, though sometimes just for the fun of it. In his merry moments, Othello liked to jest with kind, loyal and loving Iago, little suspecting that this man, so close to his family, was a demon who hated him and who was bent on revenge.

Iago's first hints at Desdemona's faithlessness greatly amused Othello-Salvini. But that did not deter Iago. His plan was to lead his prey step by step into the very Hell of jealousy. At first, Othello appeared struck by a thought he had never entertained, but only for a moment, for the thought was too ridiculous. The improbability of what Iago was supposing seemed ridiculous, if only because he knew that could not be–Desdemona was too pure. But, without knowing it, Othello was already one step nearer to his destruction, and that gave Iago an opportunity to push him farther down. Iago's new hint about Desdemona made Othello think long and seriously, for what Iago was saying this time seemed more real and possible. Othello found it harder to dismiss the thought and regain control of himself. When he did, he grasped hungrily at his shaken happiness which had almost escaped him. Then, an even more probable hypothesis was placed before him. No sooner had the poison taken effect than Iago presented him with a new and rather plausible fact that led to a logical conclusion from which it was impossible to escape. Suspicion was growing into conviction; the only thing lacking was factual evidence. Salvini put in so much vividness, merciless logic and irresistible persuasiveness into the portrayal of Othello's step-by-step descent from the heights of bliss to the depths of destructive passion, that the spectator saw how tortured Othello's soul was and deeply sympathized with him.

Othello's new meeting with Desdemona did not make him happy; his doubts were torturing him. If all this is a lie, if you are so beautiful and pure, then I am guilty of crime against you. I will repent and love you ten times more than before. But if what Iago says is true and you are as false as you are beautiful and hide your moral baseness behind your heavenly beauty, then you are a snake and one the world has never seen, and I must crush you. Where and how am I to find the answer to this question, which I must solve now, at once. I want to kiss you, but I am afraid to soil myself; I want to love you, but I must hate you. This doubt, as portrayed by Salvini, grew to such proportions that one began to fear for his Othello. It was painful to see Othello move in disgust from surprised Desdemona when she tried to embrace him and touch his aching head. And the very next moment Othello was repentant and wished to make up for the ugly outburst. He became tender as never before, he stretched out his arms to press Desdemona to his heart. She

As Cavaliere di Ripafratta in Goldoni's *The Mistress of the Inn* (1914)

approached him, but doubt took hold of him again and he stopped her abruptly to make sure she was not deceiving him. He retreated from her, or rather from the struggle going on within him, from his doubts. When Salvini next appeared on the stage, his soul seemed to be on fire, as if molten lava had been poured into his heart. His body looked as if it was burning, he was suffering not only morally, but physically. Seeking a way out of his pain, he grasped at anything that might assuage him; he wept like a child when he said farewell to his soldiers, to his steed, to the cannon, to his former life; he tried to express in words the burning pain in his heart which we, his audience, were feeling with him. But all in vain. Othello sought respite from his pain in revenge and jumped furiously at the only living thing he saw: Iago. He threw him down, leapt on him, pressed him to the floor, jumped up again and lifted his foot to crush his head, then became ashamed, turned away and, without looking at Iago, gave him his hand to help him to his feet. After that Othello threw himself down on a couch, crying like a tiger in a steppe when he has lost his mate. At that moment there was a striking resemblance between Salvini's Othello and a tiger. I saw that even before, when he embraced Desdemona or when he addressed the Senate or when he walked, there was something feline, something of a beast of prey in him. But this tiger could turn into a gentle child—he looked so childish when he prayed Iago to save him further torture, to tell him the worst, so long as this would put an end to his doubts.

Salvini turned Othello's oath of revenge into a solemn knightly ceremony—it was like a crusader swearing to save the sanctity of the world from profanation. In this scene Salvini was monumental.

Salvini's Othello was furiously happy when he saw conclusive proof—the handkerchief—in Cassio's hands. This completely solved the problem that had been torturing him. We saw what it cost Othello to restrain himself after he had taken the final decision. At times, he just could not do so. For instance, in the scene with Emilia, he was unable to hold his hand and with a tigerish gesture almost tore a piece of flesh from this procuress, whom he considered the most blameworthy. Still harder was it to control himself in the presence of the Venetian ambassador Lodovico—we saw fury rising to his throat and head and then burst out. The catastrophe came: he struck the one he had adored and now hated more than anything else in the world.

I dare not take upon myself to describe how Salvini's Othello crept towards the sleeping Desdemona in the last act, how his own cloak, dragging behind, frightened him, how lovingly he admired the sleeping woman, how he became afraid and nearly ran away from his prey. When Salvini's Othello strangled his beloved, when he killed Iago with a single blow of his scimitar, I again saw a Bengal tiger's impetuosity, agility and energy in the man. But when Othello learned of his fatal mistake, he suddenly became like an embarrassed boy who saw death for the first time. And having spoken before his suicide, he again became the soldier who was accustomed to facing death and who was not afraid of it now that it had come.

How simple, clear, beautiful and monumental was everything Salvini showed and did!

I do not know whether he understood his Othello as I did. But that was the way I wanted to see him, or rather that was the way I would have liked to play the Moor myself.

ERNEST POSSART*

Leopold Paradis** set up a German theatre in Moscow and among the visiting actors appearing in it were some of the best German and Austrian players of the day: Barnay, Possart, Haase and Sonnenthal.*** At one time the new theatre was very popular, especially during the guest performances by Possart and Barnay.

Possart was an *actor* in the best and the worst sense of the word. Barnay was a handsome *man* with a poetical soul.

"Mein Organ ist mein Kapital (My voice is my capital)!" Possart used to say pathetically. He took great care of his voice and followed a special regimen and hygiene for it: he never ate or drank anything that was hot or cold. He always carried a thermometer to test the temperature of his food. He would put it into the soup and wait until it cooled down to the required temperature. Then he would rinse it in water and put it into the glass with wine. And if the latter was too cold, he would hold the glass in his hand until it had warmed up. I do not take it upon myself to judge whether these precautions were necessary or just a show-off.

And indeed, Possart's voice was not only naturally excellent, but also wonderfully trained–it had a tremendous pitch and was melodious and powerful. Unfortunately, he lisped unpleasantly. Unfortunately too, he used his splendid voice not to express his thoughts and feelings simply, strongly, nobly and beautifully, but to chant monologues in the typical German way of unnatural declamation. He was in love with his voice and tried to force it upon the audience. Why? If you possess a good voice, thank your fate for that, but use it naturally. A good voice will always please. To over-advertise a good thing is to degrade it. In moments of great passion Possart resorted too much to chanting and conventional declamation, as if being anxious to make up for the absence of genuine emotion. That is why his acting in tragedies, though beautiful and clever in its own way, was always somewhat cold. Such is always the case when technique is used for the sake of technique.

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* *Ernest Possart* (1841-1921)–famous German tragedian who often visited Russia.

** *Leopold Paradis*–German entrepreneur who hired a theatre in Moscow in Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street (now Herzen Street), which he called "International." It is now called the Mayakovsky Theatre.

*** *Adolf Sonnenthal* (1832-1909)–famous actor of the Vienna Burgtheatre. Appeared both in classical plays and in drawing-room plays by bourgeois dramatists.

I have seen Possart many times, and yet I remember nothing of his tragic rôles except that he knew how to speak of the *eternal,* even though he did not know how to create it, and that he spoke of it not "*once and for all time,*" but every time. In this he was like other great actors.

But then he was excellent in comedy: here he displayed exceptional simplicity, distinction, artistry and finesse. In Erckmann-Chatrian's *Friend Fritz,* in which he played a kindly and lovable rabbi, he created a character one could not but admire. I shall always remember and cherish this portrayal. No less wonderful was he in Björnson Björnstjerne's *Fallissment* in which, appearing only in one act and playing a shrewd lawyer who advises a businessman to declare himself bankrupt, he created an unforgettable character. He was also good as Iago, barring the tragic places. But he was best when he had to create a character rôle or when he had to sing in a vulgar and soldier-like manner. In my opinion, he was a splendid character actor. And it was as such that he tackled tragic parts. He would undoubtedly have achieved even greater fame in our art if he had restricted his repertoire to these character rôles in which his talent was seen to the best advantage. For some reason, however, people think that only a tragedian can be a great actor. That opinion, I hold, is just as absurd as would be the one claiming that to be a beautiful woman one must be a brunette. Possart possessed an exceptional ability to create types: he used special colours and methods for his splendid make-up. In classical rôles he used wonderful cotton paddings for his arms and legs and in other parts he made up his bare arms excellently.

Possart's arrival coincided with my quests in art and my search for someone to teach me drama. When I heard that the great actor had agreed to teach an acquaintance of mine, I rushed to him and Possart consented to being my temporary teacher. We started at once. First he made me read several monologues in Russian. He did not say anything when I had finished, but told me to learn a German poem for the next lesson. What with a bad memory and poor knowledge of the German language, the job was not easy. But I managed to learn it somehow. Possart greeted me rather coolly, went straight to the piano and struck a few chords.

"This poetry should be read in C major," he explained, "and then it goes into D minor; these are the eighths and these are the full notes."

He set forth his theory, which he based on music, and illustrated his thoughts on the piano. I must confess that I did not understand him well because I did not know the language. Possart soon left Moscow and that was the end of our lessons.

I last met the great actor in Munich, at the Prinzregent Theatre where he was *oberintendant*. I was at that excellent theatre for the Wagner Festival and met my former teacher during the intermission. Possart, however, did not even answer my greeting: either he did not recognize me or did not see my bow. At the theatre I met a Moscow acquaintance of mine who was a habitué there. He promised to get me permission to inspect the building and the stage of the theatre, in which I was interested because I hoped some day to build a theatre of my own. We visited Possart, who immediately recognized my companion and greeted him affably.

"Allow me to introduce my compatriot and friend and your admirer, Alexeyev-Stanislavsky."

Possart bowed to me without recognizing me, and we exchanged greetings.

"Mr. Stanislavsky is the manager of the well-known Moscow theatre, the Society of Art and Literature, and also acts in its plays."

After these words something happened to Possart, I still do not understand what. He became a different man, assumed a most theatrical pose, one that would have looked unnatural even on the stage. You have probably seen this pose–actors assume it to display arrogance and importance: one hand behind the back, the other shoved inside the waistcoat, head proudly thrown back a little, eyes scrutinizing you.

"Mr. Stanislavsky requests your permission to inspect the building and the stage," my companion continued, slightly taken aback, as I was too.

"*Dass kannn nicht ssseinnnn* (That's impossible)!" the great actor replied.

I quite understand why he refused me. After all, one can't show one's stage secrets to every man connected with the theatre. But why his affected pose and his declamatory tone with so many n's in his last phrase?

To me Possart is a specimen of a hard-working, intellectual actor. He showed me what results one can achieve with the aid of technique if not in tragedy, then in high-class comedy.

*THE KLIMENTOVA SHOW**

In her time, Maria Klimentova-Muromtseva was a well-known *prima donna* who became a singing teacher towards the end of her career. . . . I was presenting several excerpts with the participation of her pupils. Thanks to her popularity and influence she was able to get one of the best theatres in Moscow, with its chorus and orchestra, for the occasion. Thus, instead of resting, the poor choristers had to come for rehearsals with unknown singers and the little-known crank of a director as some called me. Their attitude to the whole thing was anything but exemplary. We were rehearsing the monastery scene from Glinka's famous opera *Life for the Tsar.* The story is about the Russian legendary hero, the peasant Susanin, who, to save the tsar, takes the Poles into a dense forest. Realizing that the old man has cheated them, the Poles kill him, but they themselves perish in the cold. In the meantime, his son Vanya hastens on horseback to the monastery where the tsar is taking refuge. The boy, who can hardly reach the rings on the gates, hammers desperately to wake up the monks. Freezing, he prays before a sacred image or sits doubled up, waiting for the gates to open. The actress who played the rôle was very short, was dressed in a big fur coat (supposedly her "father's"), a big fur hat with laps that were tied on the cheeks. Her little figure, rolled up at the huge monastery gates, her childish eyes looking at the sacred image as she prayed, the icon lamp burning against the background of the old forest and tall white monastery walls–all this created a beautiful picture. The famous aria, which she sang in this scene, was well illustrated and at the same time served to illustrate the scenery. The childish voice is finally heard, the monastery awakens, a monk comes out, followed by others. The treasurer is awakened. Novices come out, beggars, cripples, the tsar's and tsarina's suite, and finally the abbot himself. The boy jumps on a stump to be above the crowd of monks and sings a beautiful, though tense aria in which he tells them of the imminent danger.

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* It was at the Maly Theatre that Stanislavsky made his début as an opera director in March 1897 when he staged a performance with Klimentova-Muromtseva's pupils. The Klimentova Show he speaks of in this chapter was his second experiment in opera direction. It was staged at the Bolshoi Theatre in March 1898. The programme included the scene from *Ivan Susanin (Life for the Tsar),* the third act of César Cui's opera *Ratcliffe* and the second act of C. Reinecke's opera *The Governor of Tours.* On the posters, the name of the director was given as "K. A." (Konstantin Alexeyev).

The crowd of black, serious-looking monks against the white background of the monastery wall and snow looked extremely impressive, both with regard to colour and grouping. The picture was exactly as we had planned it to be.

At one of the rehearsals, the choristers were in the wings, talking of their own affairs, and failed to start when their turn came.

"The monks' chorus!" I shouted from my seat. "You're on!"

The choristers giggled.

I repeated my command.

The answer was laughter, good and loud.

I rushed into the wings.

"What's the matter!" I yelled. "Why doesn't the monks' chorus come out?"

This time the choristers literally rolled with laughter.

The whole thing was beyond me.

Then one of the choristers, a Czech by nationality, an elderly and experienced singer, well respected by the rest and excellently acquainted with all the operas, approached me.

"Not monks, but paysane," he said angrily and at the same time ironically with a Czech accent.

"What paysane?" I asked.

"We're not monks, we're paysane," he repeated.

"And who, pray, lives in a monastery?" I questioned, surprised.

The Czech looked thunderstruck. The look on his face was tragic.

"Monks," he groaned.

"Then, who comes out from the monastery?"

Here the whole chorus looked stunned. The choristers eyed each other, shrugging their shoulders. Then a shout of surprise: "M-on-k-s!!!"

Why their strange behaviour? In the old days it had been forbidden to show monks, priests or any ecclesiastics on the stage. The censors considered this a sin and in the text the word "monks" was replaced by the word "paysane" because the first edition of the opera was published abroad and the libretto of this first Russian national opera was written by a foreigner.* And, indeed, after that it was always a chorus of peasants that came out from the monastery. The most interesting thing was that my order for costumes for monks surprised not only the chorus, but the entire administrative staff. The notification I got from the management of the theatre said, not without annoyance, that no monks' costumes were required in *Life for the Tsar.* In my official reply, I asked who it was who lived in a monastery–monks or peasants. I was later told that my question had stunned the management as much as it did the choristers.

FROM THE CHAPTER "THE COSTUME DRAMA LINE INSTEAD OF INTUITION"

Julius Caesar

Of other stage effects achieved in this play mention should be made of the storm scene with clouds floating in the sky, flashes of lightning and patter of rain–effects that in those days were a novelty on the Moscow stage. In the second act we succeeded in creating an extremely lifelike garden in a suburban villa, with a view of Rome in the distance against the background of the rising sun. In the forum scene, in front of the colossal statue of Pompey, we achieved an excellent effect in presenting the brewing revolt and the growing impatience of the plotters in the midst of an inert crowd of Senators who had not been initiated into their plans. Also interesting was the camp scene with several tents, with people going from one to another as required by the play. In the same scene we made skilful use of mirrors to show the ghost of Caesar. On the whole, it must be said that we put in a lot of effort and ingenuity to make the play outwardly effective.

In our theatre we made it a habit to follow up our dress rehearsals with another round-table reading of the play. *Julius Caesar* was no exception. The actors were unusually enthusiastic, for it seemed that we had found not only the necessary outer form, but also the solution for the inner tasks which would enable us to live our parts in this Shakespearean play just as naturally as we did in Chekhov's. But I must own up that I failed to do so, at least in the first few performances. There were many reasons for that: firstly, the dangerous–as far as I was concerned–"opera" colour, i.e., cloaks, togas, theatrical poses, etc.; secondly, the impossibility of finding "genuine passion in the existing conditions," and this was due to the fact that every detail of the production, every bit of the scenery on the stage and out of it, had been sprinkled with our sweat and reminded me of the hard work we had put in, and instead of creating the necessary mood on the stage this destroyed it. When we performed the play in Petrograd, on a new stage, that feeling vanished, the scenery appeared new and the truth of inner stage life returned to me. I began to play much better and my performance got good notices. I must say, however, that it is very difficult to go on with improving one's rôle after it has been played. Many of the actors mechanically repeated what they had achieved during the rehearsals. On my part, I continued to work on the rôle and in time it became richer and, so to speak, fuller.

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* It was the Russian poet V. A. Zhukovsky who suggested the Ivan Susanin theme to Glinka. The author of the libretto, recommended by Zhukovsky, was Baron G. F. Rosen, a talentless poet and a protégé of the imperial court.

The title rôle was played by Vasily Kachalov. Usually tractable and easy to please, he at first flatly refused the part because he thought it unimportant and uninteresting. But Nemirovich-Danchenko persisted, and he was right. Kachalov did a great job as Julius Caesar: he created a true-to-life character type and it may be said it was this part that first brought this splendid actor his popularity.

We encountered a great many difficulties with the production. Firstly, there were many supernumeraries in the mass scenes, many costumes and an orchestra, and that entailed huge expenses. Secondly, it was physically exhausting, for there were too many changes of costumes some of which were too heavy–heavy cloth cloaks and armour with felt lining–and others, on the contrary, too light–home-made tunics which we had to put on our hot bodies and then expose ourselves to the inevitable draft on the stage.

The play created quite a sensation and not only in theatrical circles and the press. It drew scientists into discussions on the genuineness of our archaeological details. School-teachers came with their pupils and then told them to write essays on Roman life as presented by the Moscow Art Theatre.

An interesting lecture at the Moscow Psychological Society was accompanied by a no less interesting experiment: those attending were asked to give a detailed description of Caesar's assassination on the stage. The testimony presented was most variegated. Some saw what we had not even thought of and were ready to swear to it.

Julius Caesar was too costly and exhausted the actors and we struck it off our repertoire. We sold the scenery and costumes to a provincial theatre, but as we later learned no one knew there how to wear the costumes and which were for men and which for women.

FROM THE CHAPTER "THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL LINE"

Nikolai Gogol, speaking of stage art, once said: "Anyone can ape an image; only a big actor can become one." There is a big difference between *resembling* an image and *becoming* one, i.e., between pretending to feel and really feeling.

We actors like to ape an image, to present the result, but we do not know how to do that something to make these results, i.e., these images and passions, form themselves within us intuitively. When this is so, the actor achieves the best results possible–the inner image blends with the outer, one engenders and backs the other, their interconnection is indestructible. But sometimes one achieves the same result in an absolutely different way. At times one hits upon the inner image quite by accident, thanks to some word that penetrates into one's very soul. Strange, sometimes people tell me much more important things and they do not touch me, and yet some simple, ordinary word hits the bull's-eye and penetrates right into the main creative centre.

Here is an example: when we were staging *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man,* Nemirovich-Danchenko read us a series of excellent lectures about Ostrovsky. Nothing helped until he casually mentioned: "There is much of Ostrovsky's epic serenity in the play."

And it was this "Ostrovsky's epic serenity" that penetrated into the innermost recesses of my creative soul.

It was much the same thing with the outer image of General Krutitsky.

I was shown, and I found myself, a great many photographs, sketches and drawings that seemed to fit the outer image. I was even shown the man who served Ostrovsky as a pattern for his Krutitsky. But I failed to recognize him. Neither did I see my Krutitsky in any other material that was put at my disposal.

And then it happened. I had to attend to some business in the so-called Orphans' Court. It was one of those outdated institutions that people had forgotten to abolish. The building housing it, the routine and the people were bent with age and covered with moss. In the yard of this once important institution stood a decrepit house and inside was an old man (who had nothing in common with my Krutitsky). He was writing something, writing as assiduously as General Krutitsky wrote the plans no one wanted. The general impression I got from this house and its lone occupant brought me in some mysterious way to the make-up, face and figure of my general. I was obviously influenced by the "epic serenity" reigning in that house. The outer and inner images that I had found separately blended into one. That is why in this rôle the line of "portraying images and passions" gave way to another line—the line of "intuition and feelings," the only correct one in my opinion. It was as if a switchman had shifted me and my train from a siding on to the main line, and I went speeding onward.

ARGUING WITH AN ARTIST*

There was a time when the stage did not know the artist, when the job of making the scenery was done by a painter-decorator, who was paid once a year and who did all that was required of him. From the point of view of art, that was a bad time. Then, to everyone's joy, the artist appeared at the theatre. At first, he was like a modest tenant who had just rented a room and kept to himself. But little by little he took the power into his hands and in some theatres became the main initiator of productions, their almost sole creator, and pushed the actor out of his old and lawful place. I felt this especially keenly when one of the well-known artists, who was doing a play in our theatre, sent me a sketch of my make-up with a categorical order that this was how I should make myself up. I looked at the sketch and saw the face of some unknown person, entirely unlike the one pictured by the author of the play and, under his influence, by myself. It looked as if the artist had not even read the play, that he knew nothing of the complex spiritual and analytic work we were doing on the play and the rôles to create the necessary characters. In my opinion, the artist's raw sketch looked miserable and his presumption insulting.

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* Without mentioning the name of the artist, Stanislavsky stresses, as it were, that the chapter refers to all artists in general. The reason for his writing it was his argument with Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, who did the scenery for Turgenev's *The Provincial Girl*. Stanislavsky, who played Count Lyubin, rejected the sketch of the make-up suggested by Dobuzhinsky as one that did not fit in with his idea of the image.

It's good, I thought, that I am in a privileged position, that I can argue with the artist and stand for my view-point. True, it's not easy, but possible. But just imagine for a moment an actor or a stage director who is not in a position to argue with an authoritative artist, and one cannot help feeling hurt for our art and being horrified by the violence to which the artistic soul is being subjected. To illustrate. An actor has created, developed and fallen in love with the image which he has thought out well, and then—presto!—he receives a packet from Yalta or the Caucasus where the artist is resting and enjoying nature. The packet contains a portrait of an unknown person and the actor is ordered to accept this make-up and use it for the image that he has created in his soul.

"I am sorry," the actor says timidly, "but I have not the honour of knowing this strange and unpleasant gentleman."

"Don't argue, that's your make-up," he hears the order from above.

And the actor can do nothing but behead the image he has created and put on the head of the hated stranger. But will this dead mask express the feelings surging inside the actor? What will be the result of such misblending?

In the meantime, here is how our artist in the Caucasus argues:

"This character for whom I am to create the make-up is evidently a silly man. Therefore, he should have a low forehead." Saying this, he draws a low forehead. "Then he is an aristocrat and that means he has a thin nose and thin lips." And he draws a thin nose and thin lips. "He is a dandy. That demands a fashionable beard He is obviously an evil man. So, we'll make him dark with bushy brows. . . ." And so on and so forth.

It may happen that the actor decides on unexpected contrasts: a blonde villain, an aristocrat with a thick nose, a fool with a high forehead.

In my case, I could not restrain myself and told the artist:

"You should not dictate to us. On the contrary, it is our artistic feeling that should dictate to you, show you what we performers have in mind and what we need for our rôles. Your job is to understand our plans, grasp their content and tell us with the help of your sketches what cannot be said in words. Like actors, you are not an independent creator. We depend on the

Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky (1923) author and willingly co-operate with him; you depend on the author and the actor and should also co-operate willingly with them."

You should have seen what happened to the artist who thought he was the sole creator of the production!

"What!" he exclaimed indignantly. "You want me to be a prompter to some actor?! I prefer to command them. No, I don't want to bother myself even with that. I just do. And I don't care whether or not my sketches suit them. It's enough that I'm wasting time on the theatre when I could paint pictures."

"Then you don't belong with us," I answered him. "You're a tenant who wants to be a landlord. You don't need the theatre or the dramatist, Shakespeare or Gogol, Salvini or Yermolova. What you want is our stage to exhibit your paintings. You need our bodies to dress them up in your costumes. You need our faces to paint on them as you would on canvas. You want the theatre and us only to build up your fame. You can do that best in the theatre which daily attracts thousands of spectators, whereas art exhibitions are visited by dozens at most. You should first come to love the great ideas of the dramatists, the big talents of actors, the very art of the actor, which you probably do not even understand. Remember, if there were no actor, there would be no theatre, and if there were no theatre you wouldn't be in it. Come to us, work with us as a stage director and as an actor in analyzing the play, in revealing its superconscious life. Help us to recreate it and when, as a stage director and artist, you will have realized what can be done with the acting and scenic material at the disposal of the theatre and the play, then go to your studio and give yourself to your own inspiration. Then your creation will not be alien to us, who have suffered so much with you. So long as you do not understand my words and my indignation as an actor, you will be a stranger in the theatre, an unwanted member of our family, a temporary tenant in our house. And we thirst to co-operate with a real artist who loves and understands the lofty mission of the theatre and our stage art."

NOTES

[1] Konstantin Stanislavsky was 60 when he started writing *My Life in Art* in 1923; at that time the Moscow Art Theatre was touring Europe and North America. Given very little time to complete the book, which was to be published first in English, Stanislavsky missed many things of which he wanted to tell his reader.

The manuscript was completed in February 1924. Three months later, in May, it was published by an American firm and it is this book that English-speaking readers know.

On his return to Moscow, Stanislavsky set out to prepare the Russian edition and the editing was so heavy that it may safely be said that he actually rewrote the book. The original manuscript, he said, was "too naïve." Thus, it is only the 1925 Russian edition that can really be considered final.

The present edition includes all the minor corrections made by the author for the 1928 and other subsequent editions.

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[2] On his father's side the ancestors of Konstantin Sergeyevich Alexeyev (Stanislavsky) were peasants in Yaroslavl Gubernia. His great-great-grandfather was a serf who was given his freedom in the early half of the 18th century. His great-grandfather had an embroidery factory in Moscow. Stanislavsky's father, S. V. Alexeyev (1836-1893), went to work in the factory office at the age of 14 and later headed the business (Vladimir Alexeyev Company). In 1859 he married Yelizaveta Yakovleva (1841-1904).

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[3] Aunt Vera–Vera Vladimirovna Sapozhnikova–was the elder sister of Stanislavsky's father.

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[4] Polina Mikhailovna Karpakova–a ballerina of the Bolshoi Theatre.

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[5] Kuzma (Kozma) Prutkov was the collective pseudonym of the writers A. K. Tolstoi and the brothers A. and V. Zhemchuzhnikov. Their first work appeared in the 1850's. They wrote poems, fables, plays and aphorisms which soon became bywords in Russian language ("You can't comprehend the incomprehensible," "Look into the root of things," etc.).

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[6] Benoit-Constant Coquelin (1841-1909)—a well-known French comedian whose skill is typical of "entertainment art." While giving credit to Coquelin's skill, K. S. Stanislavsky stresses the superiority of the outstanding Russian actor Shumsky who was an exponent of the "art of living the part."

Stanislavsky characterizes these two basic theatrical trends—the art of entertainment and the art of living the part—in his book *The Actor's Work on Himself.*

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[7] Nadezhda Medvedeva (1832-1899)—an outstanding actress of the Maly Theatre in Moscow, was keenly interested in the activity of the Society of Art and Literature. Stanislavsky often resorted to her assistance in his creative work. On her part, she highly appreciated Stanislavsky's talent and already in 1896 told him that he "would surely do something for the theatre" and that his name "would go down in history."

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[8] Stanislavsky presented a copy of this book to Maria Yermolova with the following inscription: "To the Pride of the Russian Theatre, to the World Genius, to the Great, Unforgettable, Dearly Beloved Maria Nikolayevna Yermolova from her constant and ardent admirer, her enthusiastic fan, her grateful pupil and sincere and loyal friend, K. Alexeyev (Stanislavsky).
"22/IX/1926."

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[9] The theatre in Lyubimovka was built in 1877.

Here is how Stanislavsky's sister, A. S. Shteker (née Alexeyeva), describes it in her memoirs: "The auditorium had a double-lighting system, a gallery, then came an arch and the place where a stage was set up (it was never dismantled); along the corridor there were four dressing-rooms for the actors, each with a door leading outside, a sort of an exit for the actors."

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[10] Stanislavsky's elder brother, Vladimir Sergeyevich Alexeyev (1861-1939), had a talent for music and was a member of the Alexeyev Circle. After the Great October Revolution he worked with Stanislavsky at the Bolshoi Theatre's Opera Studio. He was a stage director and instructor in rhythmics to his very last days. In 1935 he was awarded the title of Merited Artiste of the R.S.F.S.R.

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[11] Stanislavsky's sister Zinaida Sergeyevna Sokolova (1865-1950) was an active member of the Alexeyev Circle. Later she played at the Art Theatre and helped Stanislavsky in his pedagogical work. She was an instructor and stage director at the Bolshoi Theatre's Opera Studio. In 1935 she was awarded the title of Merited Actress of the R.S.F.S.R.

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[12] In the vaudeville *The Old Mathematician, or the Appearance of a Comet in a Provincial Town*, 14-year-old Stanislavsky played the rôle of the retired mathematics teacher Stepan Stepanovich Molotov, while in the vaudeville *A Cup of Tea* he portrayed Stukalkin, an official

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[13] Yakov Ivanovich Gremislavsky (1864-1941)—a make-up artist, worked in the Alexeyev Circle, the Society of Art and Literature and the Moscow Art Theatre from the day of its establishment to his death. In 1933 he was awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labour.

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[14] The music for the operetta *The Cobbler Must Know His Last* was written by Fyodor Alexeyevich Kashkadamov, Stanislavsky's childhood friend. It was staged at Lyubimovka on August 24, 1883, with Stanislavsky playing Lorenzo the postman.

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[15] Stanislavsky means the famous operetta singer Alexander Davydov.

Page 63

[16] Stanislavsky was one of the directors of the Russian Musical Society and Conservatoire from the end of 1885 to 1888.

Page 66

[17] Nikolai Grigoryevich Rubinstein (1835-1881)—a major figure in Russian musical life, teacher, outstanding pianist, conductor, sponsor of the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society (1860), founder and director of the Moscow Musical Classes (1863) and then of the Moscow Conservatoire (1866). Brother of the famous composer Anton Rubinstein.

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[18] Vladimir Nikolayevich Davydov (1849-1925)—outstanding Russian actor, People's Artiste of the R.S.F.S.R. Created wonderfully realistic characters in the Russian classical repertoire—in plays by Griboyedov, Gogol, Ostrovsky, Turgenev, Chekhov and others.

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[19] The Mamontov Circle existed from 1878 to 1893. Stanislavsky, who played in many of its productions, and Maxim Gorky highly appreciated "the all-round talent, complex nature, beautiful life and many-sided activity" of Savva Ivanovich Mamontov.

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[20] Alexander Rodionovich Artyom (Artemiev) (1842-1914)—a teacher of calligraphy and drawing by profession, started his stage career as an amateur. He joined the Moscow Popular Art Theatre in 1898. Stanislavsky characterized him as "one of the most charming actors I have ever seen.... He was extremely sculptural.... We all—Nemirovich-Danchenko and Chekhov and everyone who knew him—appreciated him because he was a wonderful unicum."

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[21] Maria Alexandrovna Samarova (1852-1919)–a member of the Society of Art and Literature and an actress of the Moscow Art Theatre from 1898. Stanislavsky held her in high esteem.

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[22] Alexander Akimovich Sanin (Shenberg) began his stage career as an amateur and later became a professional actor and stage director. Worked in the Moscow Art Theatre from 1898 to 1902 and from 1917 to 1919.

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[23] Maria Petrovna Lilina (1866-1943)–People's Actress of the R.S.F.S.R. and outstanding representative of the Moscow Art Theatre. Started her stage career in the 1880's. Met Stanislavsky in 1888 and joined his amateur circle. In 1889 she married him, helped him in his pedagogical work and continued his work after his death. It is to her that Stanislavsky dedicated his book *The Actor's Work on Himself*–"I dedicate this book," he wrote, "to my best pupil, favourite actress and loyal assistant in all my theatrical quests, Maria Petrovna Lilina."

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[24] The Meiningen Players were the court troupe of the Duke of Saxen-Meiningen (Germany). From 1870 the theatre was headed by Duke George II. His chief assistants were the actress Helene Franz (his wife) and the stage director and former comedian Ludwig Cronegk.

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[25] In the first edition of *My Life in Art* Stanislavsky wrote: "I am ashamed to admit now that when I did not fully agree with my actors, I liked the despotism of Cronegk, for I did not realize then what terrible results for the actor it could entail."

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[26] The Society of Art and Literature invited Pavel Ryabov and Ivan Grekov, two actors of the Maly Theatre, to direct their plays. Stanislavsky was disappointed with their work and called Ryabov "master of routine."

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[27] Pyotr Gnedich's one-act play *The Burning Letters* was staged by the Society of Art and Literature on March 11, 1889. This was Stanislavsky's first independent directorial effort and it clearly revealed the features of this great reformer of Russian theatrical art. Two years later his innovations in stage direction scored a complete success in Lev Tolstoi's *The Fruits of Enlightenment.*

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[28] Nikolai Vasilyevich Davydov–jurist and writer, author of the memoirs *Out of the Past.*

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[29] Although Stanislavsky himself severely criticized his performance in *Othello*, the play got favourable notices in the press. One reviewer said that "Moscow has never seen such a production of Shakespeare's tragedy." In playing Othello, Stanislavsky proceeded from the realistic traditions of the Russian theatre and from Pushkin's assertion that Othello was *not jealous* by nature; that, on the contrary, he was *trustful*.

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[30] The play *Much Ado About Nothing* created quite a stir in the press. The reviews stressed its "expert direction," "boldness" and "originality." One critic wrote: "Only a real artist, an artist-thinker, a master of his trade, can stage a play in such a way." Stanislavsky's performance was highly appreciated.

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[31] Maria Fyodorovna Andreyeva (Zhelyabuzhskaya) (1872-1953) joined the Society of Art and Literature in 1894 and was an actress of the Moscow Art Theatre from 1898 to 1905. Together with Gorky she was one of the founders in 1919 of the Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Petrograd in which she played until 1926. From 1931 to 1948 she headed the Home of Scientists in Moscow.

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[32] V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko gives a detailed description of his meeting with Stanislavsky in the book *Out of the Past* (1938).

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[33] A. N. Ostrovsky spoke of the establishment of "a Russian national theatre, of an All-Russian theatre for the democratic spectators: workers, handicraftsmen, needy intellectuals." The pre-revolutionary activity of the founders of the Moscow Art Theatre was devoted entirely to the aim of setting up a popular theatre for the masses.

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[34] The Art Theatre was joined by a group of amateurs from the Society of Art and Literature–Maria Lilina, Maria Andreyeva, Alexander Artyom, Nikolai Alexandrov, Vasily Luzhsky, Yevgenia Rayevskaya, Maria Samarova, Georgy Burdzhalov, Alexander Sanin, artist Victor Simov and make-up artist Yakov Gremislavsky, and Nemirovich-Danchenko's pupils from the Moscow Philharmonic School–Ivan Moskvin, Olga Knipper, Margarita Savitskaya, Maria Roksanova, Yekaterina Munt, Vsevolod Meierhold and others.

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[35] Victor Andreyevich Simov (1858-1935)–artist of the Moscow Art Theatre from the moment of its establishment, Merited Worker of Art. A painter of realistic trend. Between 1898 and 1905 he was almost the only artist at the theatre. In the 37 years he had worked for the Moscow Art Theatre he painted the scenery for 51 of its 92 plays.

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[36] *The Sea-Gull* was first staged at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg on October 17, 1896, with the talented Vera Komissarzhevskaya in the rôle of Nina Zarechnaya.

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[37] Here is what Nemirovich-Danchenko later wrote of Stanislavsky's work on *The Sea-Gull:* "It is an outstanding example of the creative intuition of Stanislavsky the stage director. Stanislavsky . . . sent in such rich, interesting, original and profound material for the production of *The Sea-Gull* that one could not but marvel at his talent and inspired imagination."

Page 240

[38] After one of the rehearsals of *Tsar Fyodor* Stanislavsky wrote to Lilina: "Moskvin played so well (although some said he was not at his best) that I wept and had to blow my nose repeatedly. Everyone in the auditorium, even the actors, blew their noses. A marvellous actor!"

On the occasion of the 600th performance of this play, Stanislavsky wrote to Moskvin: "My dear Ivan Mikhailovich, to play an episodic role for many years is a difficult job, but to play a rôle like that of Fyodor for as many years and with such temperament and feeling, devoting oneself completely to the rôle—why, that's stupendous. And six hundred of such stupendousness constitute an heroic feat!"

Page 243

[39] The Moscow Popular Art Theatre opened on October 27, 1898, with Alexei Tolstoi's tragedy *Tsar Fyodor.*

Page 244

[40] In the first edition of this book Stanislavsky described the visit paid to the theatre on the evening by Chaliapin. "I remember," he wrote, "that Chaliapin, who always looked happy and vigorous and who often came to our theatre and took part in its life, joined me and together we watched the stage hands hanging the curtain."

Page 244

[41] The artist V. V. Vasnetsov (1848-1926) painted the sacred images in the Vladimir Cathedral *in* Kiev *in 1885-1891.*

Page 257

[42] The *première* of A. N. Ostrovsky's *Snow Maiden* took place on September 24, 1900. In his letter to Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky wrote: "*Snow Maiden* is an event! A great event, believe me! It is wonderful, splendid; it is remarkable how artists are producing this play! I saw it rehearsed without costumes or scenery, but I left the Romanov Hall completely charmed and moved to tears. What performances by Moskvin, Kachalov, Gribunin, Ol. Leon. (Olga Leonardovna Knipper-*Ed.)* and Savitskaya! They are all good, one better than the other and, by God, they are like angels sent from Heaven to tell people of beauty and poetry."

Page 258

[43] The Moscow Popular Art Theatre's trip to the Crimea took place April 1900. The company gave 11 performances, the plays being *The Sea-Gull, Uncle Vanya, Hedda Gabler* and *Lonely Lives.*

Page 273

[44] In 1912 the Moscow Art Theatre performed in Kiev and Warsaw.

Page 288

[45] Savva Timofeyevich Morozov (1862-1905)–one of biggest Russian industrialists and owner of the firm S. Morozov, Son and Company.
Here is how Maxim Gorky characterized him: "Morozov was an exceptionally well-educated man, clever, far-sighted and revolutionary-minded. His outlook developed slowly and gradually. . . . It would be no exaggeration to say that he almost hated people of his own class."

Page 289

[46] Speaking of Stanislavsky's performance as Dr. Stockman, Leonid Leonidov, the well-known Moscow Art Theatre actor, said: "There is one rôle that was the apex of his career, the most perfect of his creations. That was the rôle of Dr. Stockman. Here he was in his element! Here he displayed his genius! The inner content was so well brought out, the form blended so well with the content and helped it so much that what we saw was unsurpassed reincarnation."

Page 295

[47] Luigi (Ludovico) Riccoboni (1674-1753)–Italian actor and dramatist, author of the history of the Italian theatre and many other treatises on theory and history of the theatre. In his book *Thoughts on Declamation,* he stresses the necessity of displaying real feelings on the stage. His son, Antonio Francesco (1707-1772), an actor of the Italian theatre in Paris, also studied the theory of stage art. He wrote *The Art of the Theatre* in which he emphasized the necessity for the actor to work well on his rôle.

Page 328

[48] Friedrich Ludwig Schröder (1744-1816)–outstanding German actor, stage director and dramatist. His aim was to establish a national theatre. He denied aesthetics and classicism. His repertoire included plays by Shakespeare, Lessing, Schiller and *Sturm und Drang* young dramatists. His theatre was the best in Germany.

Page 328

[49] "Superconscious" is a word Stanislavsky borrowed in his time from idealistic psychology. In his later works he used the word "subconscious," which reflects better his attitude to the nature of the actor's creation and conforms with modern scientific terminology. Speaking of the "subconscious," Stanislavsky meant above all unknown sensations, feelings and aspirations. "Feeling," he wrote, "is an unknown thought, an unknown wish or will. It is a subconscious thought and will."

Page 329

[50] Maria Taglioni (1804-1884)–famous Italian dancer.

Page 331

[51] Anna Pavlova (1882-1931)–one of the most famous Russian dancers in the first half of this century.

Page 331

[52] On May 5, 1905, Stanislavsky addressed a general meeting of the studio troupe at the Art Theatre. Speaking of the tasks facing the studio, he said: "Now, when the social forces of the country are awakening, the theatre cannot and has no right to serve pure art only. It must reflect social sentiments, explain them to the public, educate society."

Page 332

[53] Ivan Ivanovich Titov (1876-1941)–chief mechanic in the Moscow Art Theatre. Worked with Stanislavsky in the Society of Art and Literature. "His experience and excellent knowledge of the stage made him not only a good assistant and executor of other people's plans, but a teacher of many stage directors and artists," wrote Gremislavsky. In 1933 Titov was awarded the title of Hero of Labour.

Page 339

[54] Edmund Kean (1787-1833)–famous English tragedian. Alexander Dumas (father) made him the hero of his melodrama *Kean or Genius and Dissipation*. The character of the actor was badly distorted by the dramatist, with the result that "theatrical Kean" and "dissipated genius" have become synonyms.

Page 353

[55] *Constantin Meunier (1831-1905)–one of the greatest Belgian sculptors and artists, who chose workers for his subjects.*

Page 358

[56] Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky (1873-1916) worked as a stage director with the Art Theatre from 1905 to 1916. Headed its First Studio.

Page 361

[57] At that time, along with the realistic plays of Russian and West-European classics, the Art Theatre staged a number of decadent and symbolic plays, among them *The Life of Man* by L. Andreyev, one of the representatives of these two trends. The theatre was attracted by the seeming "revolutionism" of some of these plays and in its search for new forms the Moscow Art Theatre yielded to the influence of the anti-realistic trends then prevailing in art. But already in 1910 Stanislavsky said: "It is better to close the theatre altogether than to stage Sollogub or Andreyev. Just try to see or read *The Life of Man* again and you will be horrified by its hypocrisy, falseness and utter distortion of things."

Page 371

[58] Stanislavsky visited Maurice Maeterlinck in July 1908.

Page 374

[59] Leopold Sulerzhitsky received an offer from the well-known French actress Réjane to stage Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* (with the Moscow Art Theatre *mises-en-scène)* at her theatre in Paris. The play was staged early in 1911.

Page 377

[60] *A Month in the Country* had its *première* on December 9, 1909, and was the first play in which Stanislavsky applied his "system" in practice.

Page 381

[61] "The World of Art"–a circle organized in Petersburg towards the end of the 1890's by artists who preached art for the sake of art.

Stanislavsky, calling them "progressive," looked upon their activity from the narrow viewpoint of a specialist, for in his opinion "they knew theatrical scenery and costumes better than others." The painters of "The World of Art"–A. Benois, M. Dobuzhinsky, B. Kustodiev and N. Rerikh–created some interesting scenery for a number of Moscow Art Theatre productions.

Page 382

[62] Sergei Pavlovich Dyagilev (1872-1929)–one of the founders of "The World of Art." From 1904 to 1908 he arranged exhibitions of Russian paintings of the 18th-20th centuries in Paris, organized concerts of Russian music and staged Russian ballets.

Page 382

[63] Isadora Duncan (1878-1927)–dancer. Regarded the dance as a natural expressive movement organically connected with music. Replaced the traditional ballet costume with a tunic and danced barefoot. Visited Russia on several occasions and was very popular. Lived in the U.S.S.R. from 1921 to 1924 and set up a studio which existed until 1949.

Page 385

[64] Gordon Craig (born 1872)–British stage director and artist. He first visited Moscow in 1908.

Page 385

[65] The First Studio separated from the Moscow Art Theatre and was reorganized into the independent Moscow Art Theatre No. 2 in 1924. The Moscow Art Theatre No. 2, which existed until 1936, like the studio, abandoned the realistic traditions of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Page 413

[66] The Second Studio was set up in 1916. It was headed by the Moscow Art Theatre stage director Vakhtang Levanovich Mchedelov (1884-1924). In 1924 it merged with the Moscow Art Theatre and its players—Nikolai Khmelyov, Mikhail Kedrov, Alla Tarasova, Olga Androvskaya, Klavdia Yelanskaya, Anastasia Zuyeva, Nikolai Batalov, Mikhail Yanshin Victor Stanitsin and others—later became the Moscow Art Theatre's leading actors.

Page 414

[67] The Third Studio was formed by members of the Students' Dramatic Studio, which had been established in 1914, and was headed by Yevgeny Vakhtangov. In 1924 it was reorganized and renamed the Vakhtangov Theatre.

Page 414

[68] The Fourth Studio was organized in 1921. Three years later it separated from the Moscow Art Theatre and became an independent theatre but under its old name. In 1927 it was renamed Realistic Theatre which existed until 1937.

Page 414

[69] The first production of the Musical Studio was staged on May 16, 1920. The Studio performed at the Moscow Art Theatre. In 1926 it was renamed the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre.

Page 414

[70] The Pushkin show, consisting of three "little tragedies"—*The Stone Guest, A Feast During the Plague* and *Mozart and Salieri*—was first staged on March 26, 1915. The staging of this show during World War I shows that the Art Theatre did not want to subordinate its art to the tastes of the chauvinistic-minded bourgeois audiences.

Page 420

[71] Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky was then People's Commissar for Education, while Yelena Konstantinovna Malinovskaya headed the Administration of State Academic Theatres.

Page 433

[72] Nikolai Andreyevich Andreyev (1873-1932)—outstanding sculptor and graphic artist, Merited Worker of Art, author of a series of excellent sculptures and drawings of V. I. Lenin. Was interested in stage scenery.

Page 435

[73] From 1919 to 1926 the Opera Studio worked in Stanislavsky's house. In 1926 it was reorganized into the State Stanislavsky Opera Studio and Theatre. Two years later it was renamed the Stanislavsky Opera Theatre. Stanislavsky headed this theatre until his death. In 1941 his theatre merged with the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre under the name of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre.

Page 440

[74] Stanislavsky considered Chaliapin a model combination of dramatic, musical and vocal art, and said that Chaliapin served as a pattern for his "system."

Page 442

[75] In 1922 the Art Theatre left on a tour of Western Europe and America. In the course of this tour it gave 561 performances. Its repertoire consisted of *Tsar Fyodor, The Cherry Orchard, The Lower Depths, Three Sisters, Ivanov, Uncle Vanya, The Mistress of the Inn, The Enemy of the People, Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man, The Karamazov Brothers, The Provincial Girl, The Death of Pazukhin* and *In the Hands of Life.*

Page 452

[76] Stanislavsky outlined a comprehensive plan of his works on stage art in a letter he wrote on December 23, 1930, to his friend and assistant in literary work, the well-known theatrical critic, L. Y. Gurevich.

"Here is my plan," Stanislavsky wrote:

"1) Volume I. The already published *My Life in Art.* Preface, Introduction (. . .), leading to the 'system.'

"2) 'Working on Oneself.' Divided into 'Living One's Part' and 'Embodiment.'

"3) Book or Volume III. 'Working on One's Rôle . . .' In this book I shall deal in detail with excerpts and tasks and through action.

"4) Book IV (perhaps it can be included into Book III, i.e., 'Working on One's Rôle) will treat of creating a polished rôle, leading to Creative Mood.

"5) Book V. 'Three Trends in Art.' The art of living one's part has been dealt with thoroughly. Therefore, the book will be about the art of performance and trade tricks (to be dealt with considerably more comprehensively).

"6) Volume VI will be devoted to the art of stage directing, of which one can start speaking only after one has dealt with the three trends, which the stage director confronts, which he is called upon to direct and which he unites into one whole.

"7) Book VII is dedicated to opera . . . Yes! . . . I have forgotten something that is most important. There is also Book VIII in which I want to speak of revolutionary art. . . ."

My Life in Art was published in Stanislavsky's lifetime. The first part of *The Actor's Work on Himself* was edited by Stanislavsky and appeared after his death. The second part of this book was prepared from the materials preserved in Stanislavsky's archive, and was published in 1948.

Stanislavsky did not complete the third book. Some of the materials of *The Actor's Work on His Rôle* were published in the 1945, 1948 and 1949-50 issues of the *Moscow Art Theatre Annual,* as well as in the volume *K. S. Stanislavsky–Articles, Speeches, Talks and Letters.*

The theme of Book IV was partially dealt with in the concluding chapters of Part I of *The Actor's Work on Himself.*

The materials intended for Book V were published in *K. S. Stanislavsky–Articles, Speeches, Talks and Letters.* No materials have been found for the planned volumes VI, VII and VIII.

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